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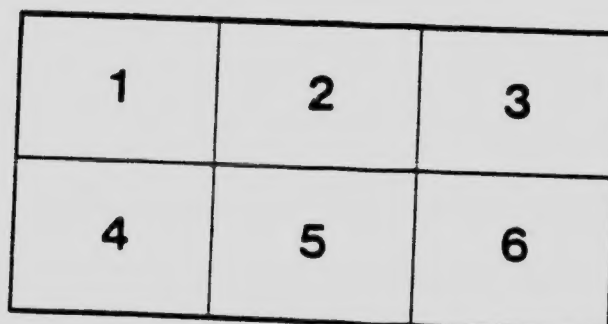
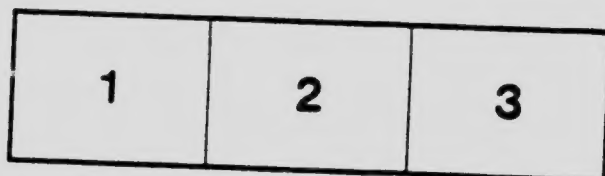
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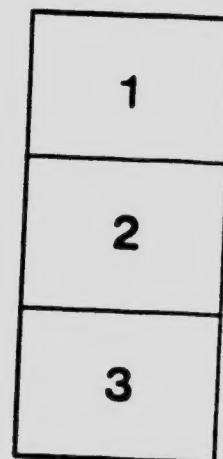
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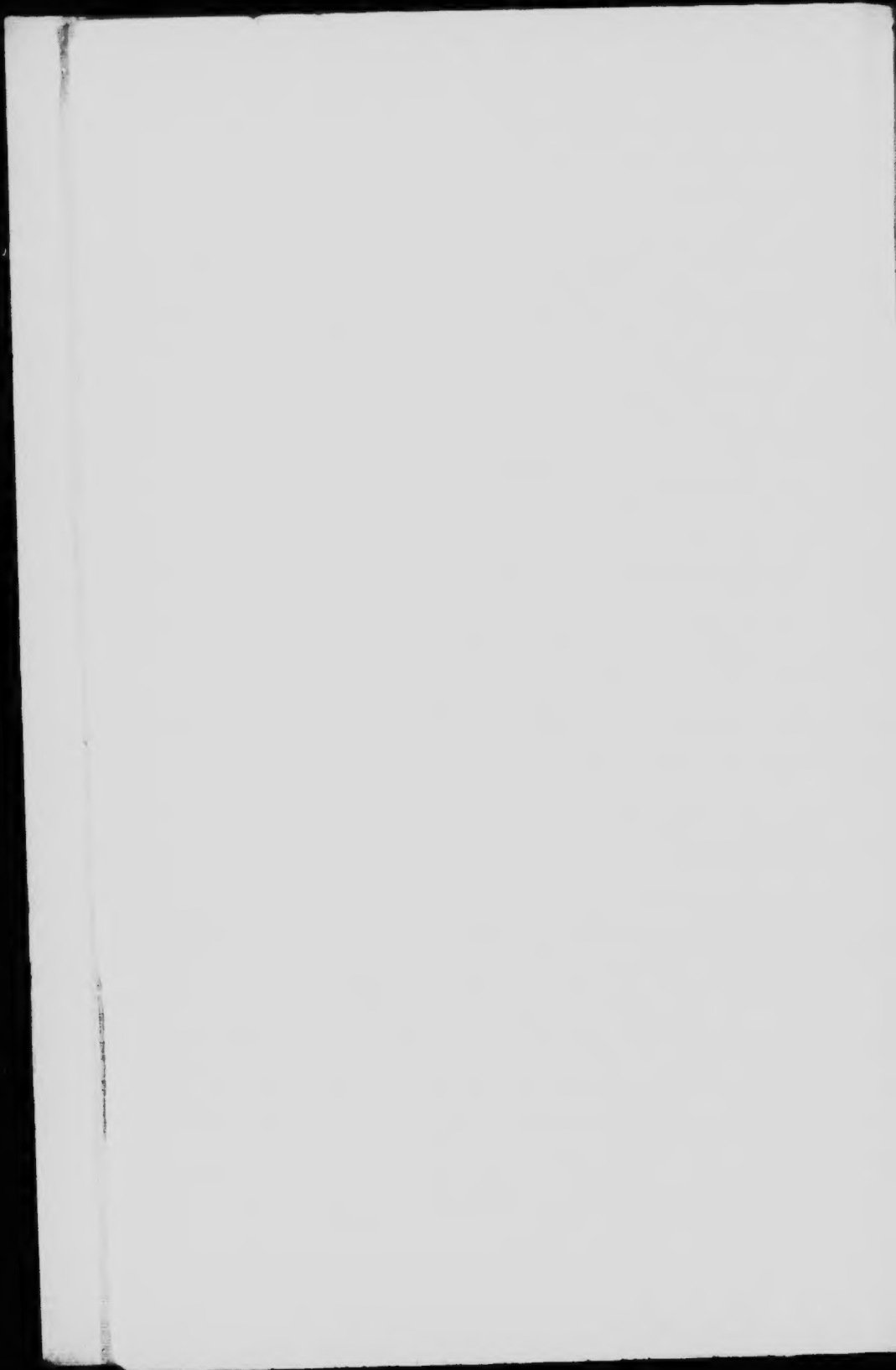
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*The Courtship of Rosamond
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(LONDON, NOW.)

TO BODO,
WHO FIRST TOLD ME STORIES.

(FORMBY, LONG AGO.)



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THE COURTSHIP OF
ROSAMOND FAYRE

PART I
IN TIME OF PEACE

INTRODUCTION

TWO GIRLS AND A MAN-IN-THE-AIR

"IMAGINE an engaged girl who commissioned another girl to—well, really, to kiss her *fiancé* for her! For it wouldn't be much more extraordinary than what she wants me to do!"

And Rosamond Fayre the secretary-girl (who was incidentally a golden-blondé, goddess-built) sat back in the chair before the drawing-room *escritoire* at Urquhart's Court, Kent, and gasped again.

"I write to Eleanor's young man for her? A girl's courtship letter! Why, it ought to be such an intimate, live, personal thing! There oughtn't to be the trace of a third person's touch about it," Rosamond told herself. "After all, love letters *are* the paper-currency for kisses; aren't they?"

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But she knew that she could never have made that last remark aloud to her girlish employer, the young mistress of the old court, Eleanor Urquhart.

Now, Miss Urquhart, a small, olive-skinned brunette, with dark, conscientious eyes, a tiny, tight-lipped mouth and a spare brown hand upon which one scarcely expected to see the blaze of that sapphire-set-with-diamond engagement-ring, was immersed in good works of every description.

And because "good works" bring in their train an endless string of business letters; because Eleanor Urquhart, though she possessed a fine head for figures, lacked the pen of a ready writer, she usually employed the readier click of the typewriter belonging to a lady secretary (who lived at The Court with herself and her father) to cope with her correspondence.

Really reliable secretary-girls are about as plentiful as really heaven-born cooks, or artists. . .

It was the day after Miss Urquhart had been forced to dismiss her fifth amanuensis in two months that she discovered the favourite of her old school, Rosamond Fayre, the Army doctor's daughter, now orphaned and penniless except for what she could earn, fainting from over-fatigue in a cash-desk at the Hotel Midas, London.

Miss Fayre possessed a clerical training that Miss Urquhart lacked. She possessed also an appearance and a voice that were invaluable in

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interviews with snobbish subscribers. Lastly she possessed a clear handwriting that Eleanor had admired even to mimicry while the girls were still at school together.

To Miss Fayre, pale and lovely in her black, cotton-backed satin business-frock, Eleanor had offered the vacant post.

Rosamond had wept with delight as she had accepted it. Then and there she had arranged to undertake that endless writing to the President of the Guild of Mothercraft and to the eleven thousand odd members of the Working Girls' Holiday Hostel Club. . .

Little dreaming of the other letters that she would presently be called upon to write !

Still dazed at the thought of this task, she stared out of the long French window at the grey stone Terrace with steps leading down to the sun-washed lawn, at the famous lime-tree avenue beyond that, and, far beyond that again, the glimpse of flat, blue Kentish Weald, in the midst of which this old house seemed to bask and doze, padded with ivy to its red chimney-stacks. In the late May, before the War, it nestled under the very wing of the Angel of Peace.

Urquhart's Court ! A lovely place !

Rosamond was lucky to be there, instead of at the Midas.

But she forgot her "luck" as she remembered the quick, authoritative young voice of Eleanor

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

Urquhart, half an hour ago, giving her instructions in the walled garden where both girls had been gathering flowers to send to a Hospital.

"It's mail-day, the day for Ted's letter, and I haven't a minute now," she had said, standing by the green door. "So, Rosamond, you'll put it together for me, please."

Rosamond had opened her pansy eyes so wide that one would have expected to see blue petals fall out upon her cheeks. She had gasped, "Put it together? You can't mean in my own handwriting?"

"Well—'our' writing! They're so very much alike, Rosamond."

"But you won't want *that* copy sent?"

"Of course. There isn't t-t-t-time to make another," from Eleanor Urquhart, who, when she was flurried, uncertain, or vexed, showed a danger-signal in the form of a tiny stutter. "Y-y-yes!"

"D'you mean it, Eleanor?"

Apparently Eleanor had meant it. And Rosamond, walking beside her, flower-laden, up the lawn, had said in turn what she meant.

"My *darling* employerette! I'll do 'anything in reason' to earn my position in this lap of luxury, but it's *not* in reason to want me to write to an engaged young man and tell him that his sweetheart hasn't got time!"

Fastidious Eleanor had frowned a little. Sometimes Rosamond, in her laughing, careless way, used

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expressions that made her, Eleanor, feel shy and cold. She disliked the old English word "sweetheart" that came without a thought to Rosamond's lips. "*Sweetheart*"—How Club-girlish! Why, it was almost as bad as "*followers*"! It would be "*walking out with*" next! In a girl like Rosamond, all this was "a pity." However, Eleanor was otherwise satisfied with the Secretary who had proved so efficient, up to now. So, as they reached the Terrace, she explained gravely:

"I don't want you to tell him that. I hate hurting people's feelings, and Ted might not understand why I was so busy. Men *don't* understand! But I promised he should have a weekly letter, and I never break promises. So I want you to write, Rosamond, as if you were me. Sign it with my name."

"But—my dear!" from the freshly aghast Rosamond. "That's impossible! Can't you understand? Heavens! It—it would be a kind of forgery!"

"No, it wouldn't. Not if I tell—ask you to do it. You wrote and signed for me those dinner-invitations."

"Dinner-invitations, yes. But a girl's l—her personal letter to a man—no! I simply couldn't."

"Why not, Rosamond? You've known more men than I have. You do sometimes write——"

"To admirers?" The secretary stopped. In Eleanor's little dark "shut" face she had observed

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

that this too was a disapproved-of expression. "Men-friends of my own, perhaps! But never . . . never a real love-letter; sheets and sheets, tiny handwriting, five postscripts, snapshots and pressed pansy enclosed and fourpence extra to pay for postage! I've never yet achieved one of those!"

"Well, n-n-n-nor have I," from the young *fiancée*, with a new coldness that had chilled the girl who lived on her salary. "You have written my letters before from dictation. You know what I should wish to have said. And you know as well as I do what has been happening here for the last few weeks. It won't take you long, Rosamond."

"No, but——"

"I will give you his last letter to me, so that you may answer any question he puts."

"And what about . . . him? . . . Mr. Ted Urquhart? Is he supposed to notice no difference—?"

"Why need he notice?" from the girl "he" was to marry. "Those dinner-party people didn't."

"No! But——"

As they reached the ivy-draped front of the house Rosamond was remembering another, a very young man, who, then in College rooms with her brother, had once written to her, "*When the postman brings letters for Fayre, I know when there is one from you! It seems to make a sound of its own, as it's pushed through the letter-box. It's different! I swear this isn't imagination! Won't you ever write to me?*"

Eleanor knew nothing about letters of this sort!

INTRODUCTION

She was saying, "It is only so that my *fiancé* does not miss a mail. That seems to mean so much to a man—Abroad. And I am—as you see—prevented. Come and write in the drawing-room," concluded Miss Urquhart less stiffly, as she passed through the huge open French windows, "it's so cool."

"Not as 'cool' as what she proposes to let me do there!" thought the reluctant Rosamond, following the small, composed figure of her girlish employer. "Writing forged letters to a young man-in-the-air! An engaged man! A man I've never seen!"

"Here you are," Eleanor had said, drawing out the topmost foreign envelope of a neat pile in a right-hand drawer of her *escritoire*. "This is his last. You've got a pen and plenty of ink?—blotting paper. . . It's a twopenny-ha'penny stamp. There are some in the little red leather box on the left there; and the foreign note-paper is here. . . Now you've got everything you want."

"Stop—Oh, wait a minute! How do I begin?" urged Miss Fayre, with a vague "*Dearest*" balancing a "*My own Boy*" at the back of her mind. Surely the "edited" editions of those dictated letters held Eleanor's own expressions before they were sent off? "If you don't mind telling me——"

"Begin? Why, 'My dear Ted.' That's all, isn't it? G-G-Good-bye!"

And the secretary-girl had been left alone to her grotesque and unthinkable and impossible new duty!

CHAPTER I

"DARLING" PER PRO

SITTING there at Eleanor's desk, staring at Eleanor's blotter and biting the end of her pen, it was long before Rosamond so much as dipped that pen in the ink.

"Oh, I can't do this," was her first decision. 'Can't! Anybody but that benighted little philanthropic innocent of an Eleanor would realise that it was quite impossible. She really is—' Hand-writings so alike,' she said! As if *that* were all there was in a letter! As if the young man mightn't suspect from a dozen things that it wasn't the usual letter. He'd be hideously annoyed with her—oh, with both of us, but I don't matter, I'm just 'the pen.' Perhaps she wouldn't mind his annoyance? But she must *learn* to mind! After all, she's going to be a very different sort of girl presently, one hopes. When the young man comes home, *that* will be the crisis! Then, she'll *grow* to mind. *Then* she'll be precious sorry she ever deputed a mere salaried menial like me to do such a crazy thing! I shall refuse."

"DARLING" PER PRO

Her blue eyes strayed about the stately old room, from lustre chandelier to Adams fireplace, its grate hidden by a cataract of fern. They rested, scarcely seeing it, on a gilt-framed Baxter print of "The Lover's Letter-box," that picture that shows a pretty Victorian in a soap-bubble of white muslin skirts, who is slipping a sealed note into the fork of a hollow tree. How unlike Eleanor's methods!

Presently came the grim thought: "Eleanor has had secretaries who 'refused' one thing or another. They went!"

And then, "Oh, but I can't go! Not back to all those horrors that I've only, by good luck and Eleanor's job, just escaped! Orders, in Cockney accents, from men who ought by rights to be calling me 'Madam'! Compliments, from the same—and worse——

"And what about London in this heat? And the stuffiness? and the smells? and washing one's own hankies in the bath-room? and the shop eggs for breakfast? and no room to put one's things? (even supposing one had 'things' to put!), and how about losing your looks, Rosamond, my child?" she addressed herself. "How about getting 'washed-out' with tiredness and round-shouldered with work, and old and out of mischief before your time?"

"No! . . . I won't! . . . I will, I mean!" And she drew her chair a little nearer the desk.

"I shall have to pay for the other. Pay by

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

writing letters from Eleanor to '*her dear Ted*.' Very well!" decided the secretary-girl with a little reckless laugh. "It's not as if he or she were the 'usual' type of engaged people. It's not as if the whole engagement weren't—well! rum in the extreme!"

For Eleanor Urquhart's engagement to her cousin Ted was a thing that never failed to amuse, puzzle and even exasperate her friend, Rosamond Fayre.

In one way, it was "so business-like."

For what could be more business-like than the action of the young man? Here he was, left heir to the beautiful old Kentish estate out of which—unless some better arrangement could be made—he would have to turn the uncle and the girl-cousin who had always lived there. And his idea of a "better arrangement" had been to propose to marry the girl-cousin, who could then continue to live in the place as if she were the heiress and the mistress thereof—merely keeping house for one extra in the family, a husband as well as her father.

Satisfactory enough.

Only, how *un*-business-like in another way! That was how it appeared to Rosamond.

Fancy being prepared to marry and to spend the rest of your life with—a person *whom you have never even seen!*

For, thanks to one accident after another, the Urquhart cousins had never happened to meet.

"DARLING" PER PRO

Eleanor had found it impossible to leave her College the last time that Ted Urquhart had stayed with his Uncle at Urquhart's Court, three years ago. And it was two years after this visit that General Urquhart, Ted's father, had died where he had always preferred to like, abroad. The beautiful Kentish mansion, which had always seemed to belong to the bookish, stay-at-home brother, had passed by right of entail to that rolling-stone, young Ted, then prospecting in Mexico ; for he was a born traveller, adventurer, ranger, even as his soldier father had been.

It had been by letter that the curious arrangement of the Urquhart engagement had been made. And by letter—for Ted, deep in schemes that were Greek to the home-keeping Urquharts, had remained abroad from that day to this—the courtship had been carried on.

"If you can call it a courtship!" Rosamond Fayre had laughed when she had first heard of it. But Eleanor had refused to see anything "odd" about this contract.

"Why, it's the best possible solution." This was Miss Urquhart's view. "There's this Court ; it's Ted's only home when he isn't wandering all over the earth. And I must have it for my drawing-room meetings and for the Working Girls' Garden Parties. And there's the library for father. He'd never get accustomed to another study. Ted couldn't turn us out ! He said so."

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"And is there no happy medium between brutally turning a young woman out of house and home, and . . . marrying her?"

Not in this case, Eleanor had pointed out. How could she be the mistress of Urquhart's Court unless she were either the daughter or the wife of the owner?

And the owner himself? Rosamond had put amused, eager questions as to what he could be like?

Eleanor was not vivid in description. She'd informed Rosamond that "Father had seemed to like him as much as he ever did like young men." He had seemed to think Ted Urquhart "nice"—though all his interests were "out-of-doors" and "crude." He'd said he would have been a soldier himself but for considering that there "wasn't enough going on, nowadays," for a man in the Service. Level-headed enough, Eleanor's father had thought. Then Eleanor had fetched a letter from this Ted and read aloud:

"I don't know when you're likely to get this. You ask me how I got to this place; well, it's in a steamer from Southampton—then a three days' journey by train up-country to where the line runs out, then three more days up a river in canoes. Then mules. This last journey we couldn't even use mules, because of our machinery. We had to take the castings of it in big pieces, so somehow we

"DARLING" PER PRO

managed to cart along the pieces ourselves over the roughest parts ; don't ask what we wore, or looked like at this job "——

Here Rosamond had lifted her bright head.

" My dear ! Do you know, he sounds rather a ripper to me. Why does this type of young man always live Abroad, where one doesn't see him ? Why don't they raise a splendid great Army of them, for Home ? Do read me some more, Eleanor ! "

Eleanor's incongruously precise little voice had read out scraps about runaway mustangs, tornadoes, the mild excitement of an earthquake, of a ride in front of a runaway bull.

" And he always seems to be getting among people with knives and revolvers 'going for' each other. Or else nearly breaking his neck somewhere——"

Rosamond's eyes had danced over this description.

" I say, what a lovely man ! Good-looking ? "

" I've no photograph ; I lost the snapshots he sent," Eleanor had said. " Father said not."

" Fathers are the worst possible judges of looks in young men. I do like him for hoisting about those great hulking castings ! So different from anything we ever have to do ! " the secretary-girl had sighed whimsically. " And his being so keen on concessions for that oil they're prospecting about ! What's the oil for, Eleanor ? "

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"Lamps, I expect."

"Ah! You've never written to ask! You can't be really fearfully interested in this man!"

"Rosamond, no girl would be 'fearfully interested' in a man she hadn't seen."

"Oh, wouldn't she? Not when she'd promised to marry him? Not when he was going to be all *that* in her life? A *fiancé*! Well, if he's nothing else, *he is at least the man who keeps the other men out!*"

Eleanor had said nothing. Extraordinary, the interest that Rosamond showed in this subject! Rosamond had continued:

"And you've all his letters to piece him together out of! To keep guessing about! *I* could imagine a girl being perfectly thrilled over a *fiancé* of that sort! Much more so than over an ordinary young man with a bowler and a walking-stick, say, *that she had seen!*"

"Yes, but you're romantic. I am not. I'm so practical," Eleanor had gravely explained. "And I think that it'll make me a very good wife for a man who will probably spend three-quarters of his time carrying those castings and things up and down precipices at the other end of the earth. He's his interests; I've mine. And when we meet, we've this place in common. I am sure we shall be quite good friends."

"Friends!" Rosamond had echoed, pityingly.

"Some married people who begin by—by adoring

"DARLING" PER PRO

each other," Eleanor had remarked, "end by being n-n-n-not even friends."

"M'm. But then they've had something out of it," her friend and secretary had said, thinking—"like going to a music-hall show with one ripping 'turn' in it, and all the rest feeble. Better than sitting out a whole long dull play without one redeeming laugh!" Rosamond Fayre had decided. "I'd risk being bored for the rest of my married life, to pay for a really thrilling courtship!"

"Well, he's practical, too," Eleanor had concluded before she took up her Club accounts again. "At least from his letters. That's all I really know about him!"

The letter which Rosamond Fayre had just been given to answer was certainly "practical" enough.

It was written in the particularly small masculine handwriting which is so often guided by a particularly large masculine hand, and the crackling foreign sheet of it had arrived from some out-of-the-way No-Man's Land beyond the Andes, where Ted Urquhart with a party of other men had been sinking wells for that precious, that coveted oil. The rough, open-air camp-life, the bonfires, the tea-tins, the scraps of men's talk and laughter, the blue, up-curling cloud of tobacco-smoke, the jingling of horse's harness—a whiff of this unfamiliar atmosphere seemed brought right over the seas to that secluded English drawing-room by the few terse sentences of Urquhart's—well, it certainly

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could not be called a *love*-letter, Rosamond decided, with stars of amusement shining in her larkspur-blue eyes. It began, "My dear Eleanor," and ended, "Yours ever affectionately, T.U." Like a brother and sister!

There was a postscript which merely said, "It will be nearly June, I suppose, by the time this letter gets to the dear old Court. Write and tell me what is out in the garden, and if those last roses which Uncle Henry was so keen on have turned out any good. The place ought to be looking lovely."

"The *place* looking lovely!" commented Rosamond. "Not even one question about how the *girl* is looking! I wonder if he doesn't even want to know? How sick I shall be if the man I marry—when that fortunate individual turns up—ever writes like this! He won't, though. Rosamond's lover won't be 'level-headed'—at any rate, not as far as anything to do with Rosamond is concerned," decided that young woman, with a toss of her own beautiful head. "But to work!"

She dipped her pen in the ink and primmed her rather large red begonia of a mouth into an imitation of Eleanor's small one as she wrote:—

"My dear Ted,

"Thank you for your letter of April the First. I was very glad to hear that you were quite well, and that you had arrived safely at your destination."

("Not that she—Eleanor—really cares a capital

"DARLING" PER PRO

Dee how you are, or where you've arrived," interpolated Eleanor's new secretary, aside. "It's a matter of life and death to her that five hundred factory girls should have a rise of a shilling a week in wages, but as to what happens to a mere prospective husband—Well, but what ought she to say to him? It's always 'ought' with her. I wonder if she'll get any better—worse, I mean—when Ted comes home and tries to teach her—other things, I do hope so. Well——")

She took up her pen again.

"Yes!—The place——"

("Better put a capital P there to show how all-important.")

—"The Place looks delightful. It's a great pity that you can't see it, since you've missed every June here for so many years. I hope that you may contrive to come home, as you suggest, some time next summer——"

("That's not *too* eager and forward, I trust," thought Rosamond.)

—"and that you will not be disappointed in——"

("your reception as a lover.—No, I mean, of course——")

—"the alterations that there are—such as the new fish-pond, and the continuation of the hedge beyond the cherry-orchard—at The Court."

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She leant back.

(" *Now* what had I better put ? He's not wildly interested in her crèches and clubs and girls, I can tell. I'll just sum it up vaguely.")

" I have been very busy lately. We had a garden-party here last week. Need I add that there was a thunderstorm in the middle of it ? The purple dahlias in Mrs. Bishop's toque got drenched and dripped in mauve streaks down her face. It looked as if her complexion had run very badly."

(" Steady ! Eleanor wouldn't have written that. She never makes fun of people," said Rosamond. " I shall have to make a fair copy—a Rosamond Fayre copy—of all this. I'll begin again from 'thunderstorm.' ")

" and on Wednesday we had a dinner-party. A friend of mine is staying here now. She has trained as a clerk, and I am keeping her to help me with my business correspondence——"

(" This very letter, for example.")

--" and her name is Rosamond Fayre."

(" Hope you think it's a pretty one, Sir.")

—" Father is quite well now, and sends his love. The roses that you ask after have done splendidly——"

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"DARLING" PER PRO

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("Flowers are safe, so I suppose I can say what I like here.")

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—"They will trail in heavenly, scenty garlands and festoons of pink and white round the grey stone balustrades of the Terrace, just like decorations for a visit from Royalty. Also the 'Blue Border' is planned out. At the back stand the tallest larkspurs and delphiniums, then the clumps of deep blue borage; then come the blue Canterbury bell's, then the corn-flowers; then blue pansies, then forget-me-nots, and lastly a thick blue row of lobelia, 'underlining' it. I think this is all. So believe me, dear Ted," wrote the girl, demurely, in the handwriting that was as like her school-friend's as the voices of some twins are alike,

"Yours ever affectionately,

"R——"

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me

"Oh, how silly," she broke off impatiently, to scribble a thick "E" over the "R" which she had inadvertently written. Very nearly she had signed, in spite of everything, her own name. But it didn't show. No; it read quite evenly and naturally

"Yours ever affectionately,

"Eleanor Urquhart."

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She must practise that signature. She began to do so on a loose sheet of paper. Then she must make that fair copy of this epistle. But there was

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no particular hurry. . . 'To think that another girl—not Eleanor—might, instead of deputing the job to a paid clerk, be getting quite a lot of fun out of writing love-letters to a *fiancé* who'd never set eyes on her!" she reflected as her pen traced curly "E's" and "U's".

"For instance, *I*—if I were Eleanor—should make quite a good game out of interesting the man, making him keener to see me every letter I wrote. (She crosses the 't' in Urquhart more like *this*.) One or two should be as brief and brisk and business-like as if they came from the Manager of his Bank. The next should ask him what colours he liked a girl—*his* girl—to wear? Then I'd write rather a piteous one, as if I were begging, between the lines, to be set free from an arrangement that was spoiling my life, standing in the way of my possible happiness with somebody else!"

Rosamond, taking out a fresh sheet of paper to make her fair copy, laughed enjoyingly over this immemorial scheme.

"That would be a good one! But the same mail should bring him another note asking him whether he did not think that it might not sometimes seem a tiny bit dull for a girl all alone in this great Convent of a Court? I should wait until he replied to that, I think."

She tucked the rose she wore into greater security at her breast.

"*Then*," she told herself, "I'd begin to flirt a

"DARLING" PER PRO

little ; on paper. There might even be a pet name or so tucked into a postscript—so——"

She began scribbling idly on the rough draft.

—"and crossed out again—not that a man couldn't read it, if he tried. So!"

She made a charming picture as she sat there, this royally built, golden-haired girl smiling at the desk, playing this "game" with a phantom-lover of her own, for at the moment Eleanor and Eleanor's *fiancé*—probably a milk-sop, and surely a stick!—were forgotten. Rosamond Fayre, lost in a very silly, very common, and very natural form of day-dream, was away with the Prince Charming whose elusive face smiles back into every girlish face that has ever bent over a wishing-well.

"Of all the over-worked words in the English language, the strangest seems to be '*Darling*,'" Rosamond Fayre told herself and her dream-sweet-heart of the moment. "You say it to a girl, but it wouldn't sound silly and out of place to a man—provided it were the right man. '*My darling*!' Everybody uses it—yet it isn't hackneyed. Jokes and comic-paper stories and music-hall songs are cram-full of it—and still it's never, never vulgar——"

Her thoughts broke off, as from the tall white mantelpiece the clock, held up between two gilded nymphs, chimed twice.

"Half-past four!" she exclaimed. "Mercy! I must take this up for Eleanor to pass. . . . H'm.

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I suppose Eleanor has never written to her young man in that way in her life. Well, you can't very well dash off 'darlings' *per pro*. I'll copy this tidily."

She did so. She tore up one letter; then she carried the other to the big, airy lavender-breathing linen-room where Miss Urquhart, among the imposing piles of sheets, looked small and dark and busy as an ant in a snow-drift.

"Eleanor, do you mind looking over this? Will it do?"

"'Do'—oh, yes, dear, I am sure it will do beautifully," said Eleanor, with the merest perfunctory glance above an armful of pillow-cases marked URQUHART. HOSTEL. 1914. "Thanks so much, Rosamond. Will you see that it goes off?"

"What!—As it is?" suggested Rosamond, mischievously. "No postscripts?"

"Postscripts? What about? . . . This says all that's expected." And Eleanor held back the note to her secretary, who took it, with a little half-humorous gesture.

It was this that shook the rose that Rosamond wore in the breast of her white crêpe shirt into shedding a shower of pink petals upon the open sheet.

"Ah!" Rosamond said with an impulse, "send those in the letter."

"What, those loose petals?" said Eleanor over

"DARLING" PER PRO

her shoulder. "They aren't from the new roses he was asking about?"

"Never mind. Any English rose-leaves in a foreign country. Oh, they'd please him, I know," Rosamond said, in a voice still soft from her day-dream. "Put them in, Eleanor!"

"Very well, if you like." And the other girl, kind and untouched as a child, slipped into the crisp, grey foreign envelope a dozen sweetly-scented pink petals.

"Those," said Rosamond Fayre, "will do instead of a postscript!"

CHAPTER II

A MAN'S ANSWER

"**M**ANY thanks, my dear Eleanor, for the last three letters which have just arrived together—especially for the one all about the Blue Border, and the Roses."

"Nothing about the petals," thought Rosamond, to whom this letter had been handed as a matter of course for the Secretary to answer by Eleanor.

"By the way," the letter went on, "were you in the least little bit of a temper when you wrote? Or is that my mistake? Don't you think people's moods show in their handwriting? Your writing this time seemed to have got more dashing and determined," wrote Mr. Ted Urquhart. "Thank you for hoping I may come home next summer, but I don't know if I shall do that after all. The man I'm with has determined to—" Here followed a catalogue of the man's plans—very level-headed ones they seemed to Rosamond. Then came—

"Don't be offended, will you, about my having said that about a temper. A girl ought to have a

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gleam of a temper of her own, just to show a man
she's not

'Too bright and good
For human nature's daily food.'

You know the rest of that ancient verse."

Rosamond did ; she laughed. Then she blushed
a little.

"I never read verse ; one really hasn't time,"
Eleanor excused herself. "What is the quotation,
Rosamond ? "

"Oh, it's from Wordsworth. I will look it up
for you—something about 'human nature's daily
food—

'Praise, blame, tears'—and er—those sort of
things."

And she continued to herself, "Somehow one
can't quote even the milkiest sort of love poetry
right through to Eleanor ! One can't say 'Praise,
blame, tears, kisses'—'Kisses' wouldn't *ever* be
'daily food' to her——"

She checked herself.

"But they'll have to be, some day ! She is
engaged, and after all he *will* come back, I presume,
in the course of time, this weird young man ? Then
there'll be a difference, surely ? For instance,
she'll begin 'minding' what she puts on—instead
of not seeming to *see* what's becoming and what
isn't. When she begins to want to please him,
she'll drop those District-visiting blouses and those
virtuous little hats of hers. Oh, he'll teach her . . .

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His last letter was comparatively personal! It seemed to be taking quite an *interest* in her temper and her handwriting—mine, by the way. I'm glad he liked the bit about the Blue Border."

She laughed again. What did it matter to Rosamond what another girl's *fiancé* had liked in the letter that had been written by her secretary?

"Anyhow," she reminded herself, "it didn't seem to make him want to come home and see her any sooner! Interesting sort of affair—and here am I allowed to peep at both sides of it!"

Her interest was not much more than this kind of curiosity. For the next three weeks it—and things in general—remained just the same.

Then something happened.

In the June of Nineteen Fourteen, when it still seemed as if Peace would never spread her dove's wings to fly from this country, when red English roses were ablaze on the Terrace of The Court, and bees noisy in the borders of mignonette and in the tall towers of sweet-peas, there arrived at Urquhart's Court, unheralded, a visitor; a tall, lithe, abnormally sun-burnt young man, in clothes that spoke—first of hard weather and harder wear, and next of the first-rate Bond Street outfitters that had known them new. This stranger, ignoring the new butler's pompous "What name, Sir?" strode gaily into the great hall as if the house were his by right, and called in a big, boyish voice—

A MAN'S ANSWER

"Uncle!"

The study-door opened, and Eleanor's father looked out. He was a half-dreamy, half-fretful looking old gentleman, with a silvery beard like the portraits of Lord Tennyson, to whose period Mr. Henry Urrhart belonged far more than to the present bustling Twentieth Century.

"What's happened—who's this? Why, my—my dear boy,—Ted!" he cried incredulously, with his faded, grey scholar's eyes blinking under his white locks at the splendidly vital figure of the young man before him—"It is Ted, isn't it? Bless me—and nobody was sent to meet you! Now, how was that, how was that?"—rather querulously—"Eleanor never told me you were coming. Nobody ever tells me anything. Most unfortunate! Nobody to meet—My dear boy, if you'll believe me, I—I never even heard that you'd written to say you were coming!"

He put out a hand like a pale and chilly root, and laid it on the young man's hard shoulder.

"I never said so, Uncle Henry, I meant to turn up unannounced. I meant to take you all by surprise!" declared the traveller hurriedly. "Now, will you be very kind and excuse me for the present, Uncle? I want to introduce myself to Eleanor, and—"

The pale, chilly hand was lifted again.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit. Come into my study and sit down for a few minutes. Dear me! I was

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never so startled in my life ! Take us by surprise — Yes, but I wish you'd said you were going to," protested the elder Urquhart, as he led the way into his own room. It was overshadowed by those great yews at the back of The Court ; and, with its four walls lined with brown books, its wide table littered with manuscript, seemed as chilly as a cellar, as sunless as a vault, as void of life and homeliness as a museum. Young Urquhart of the impatient eyes involuntarily shivered a little as he looked about it. She—Eleanor—wouldn't spend too much time in this family mausoleum, surely—He didn't want to see her, even for the first time, here !

" Won't you sit down, boy ? Bless my soul, you're very like my brother Clive, your poor father. He didn't seem able to sit still for a minute . . ." said the old man. " It'll be luncheon in a quarter of an hour——"

The young man laughed, springing up from his chair again.

" Yes, I know that, Uncle. That's why I wanted to pay my respects to her—to Eleanor—at once."

" Dear me !—the unrest—the hurry of this generation——"

" Hurry ? I'm afraid I've scarcely hurried as much as I might," said Ted Urquhart, with a flash of very white teeth in that very brown face. " I've waited three years before . . ."

The old man blinked at him. Years did not

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convey much to him. But he said, "Then I don't quite understand why you've rushed back without any warning now?"

"Er—no; it seems queer," said Eleanor's *fiancé*, who didn't quite understand it himself. Why *had* the interest he'd felt about the nice little girl at home whom he was, for such excellent reasons, to marry—all in good time, and when more important things had been attended to—why had this very mild interest flamed up all of a sudden, and for the first time, into a blazing curiosity to see, after all, what she was like? Why had there seemed some subtle hint of the girl's atmosphere, her charm, her lure, conveyed for the very first time between the even lines of her very last letter to him? Why had he felt that a handful of once pink, still sweet rose-petals, pressed in the envelope, had brought with them the message—"Come home and seek me. Come and court in person the girl who picked this rose"? It was irrational—fantastic. Still—there it was—Yes! This was what had happened to him!

"I had to come over sometime!" he laughed, fidgeting. "So now I'm here, the sooner the better. Will you do me a favour, Uncle? Don't send for Eleanor, let me go to her myself. Where am I likely to find her? Where will she be? In the lily-garden, near that new fish-pond she tells me of, or——"

He was at the door, ready to search the grounds, before his uncle put in——

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"My dear boy, I am very sorry, but really, you have only yourself to blame. Why didn't you give us due warning? For your own sake you ought to have written—or even if you'd sent a wire! The fact is—most unfortunate!—that you won't find Eleanor anywhere about," announced Eleanor's father, fussily regretful, "she isn't here."

The sun-burnt face fell.

"Not here!" echoed Eleanor's *fiancé*, very blankly. "Why, where is she, then?"

"She's in France. It's a little fishing-village near Boulogne, where she has one of her undertakings. She's up to her eyes in work over it, inaugurating this Holiday Hostel for her 'girls.' You know her girls, Ted; she cares for them more than for anything else in the world," said the old man, "always will, I'm afraid."

Ted Urquhart smiled again. He was not "afraid." If it had been not just fifty girls, but *one young man* who occupied all Eleanor's time and thought, things would have looked black. But a couple of hundred other girls. Well! The thought of them weighed lighter than a dozen dry rose-petals.

"Yes; she's over there now, with her friend, Miss Fayre," her father was explaining, "and it's very little I hear from them beyond a line or so on a postcard with a view of the harbour or a girl in a Boulogne fish-wife's cap on it. They were to stay a month. However, as you are here, Eleanor shall be sent for——"

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"No, no, she shan't," said young Ted, impetuously. "I shall go on over there to her, at once."

"You will? Bless me, how you fly about, you young fellows, nowadays!" murmured Mr. Urquhart. "It's a long way to France, Clive—Ted, I mean."

Ted laughed. From Urquhart's Court *via* the South-Eastern Railway, Charing Cross, and Boulogne, across to this little village where Eleanor was putting in her time before marriage, seemed no more of a "trek" to him after his journeyings, than a stroll across the mint-sauce lawn at the Court.

"At least you'll write and tell her that you are coming? We'll both write, Ted," said the old man, turning to that littered table.

"If you don't mind, Sir, we'll do nothing of the sort," put in the young man. "I've just been struck by an idea."

He had. It was one of those ideas which seem at first so eminently satisfactory—and sane. Afterwards they appear so fatuously silly. And, later still, what would one not give to recall them, these tragically ill-fated "ideas"?

"I shall go over there and see if I can't get to know her without letting her guess who I am!" declared the young man who was engaged to Eleanor Urquhart. "If, after all these years, we have a sort of prepared meeting, each of us trying to say and do the correct thing and to make it pleasant and

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easy for the other party, it'll be—quite simply—a frost! We shall be desperately self-conscious, and hard-boiled stiff with shyness. At least that's how it would take me, Sir! Enough to put any girl off at once. I want her to see me first without her having any idea that I'm the man she's pledged herself to marry."

"I don't see," said old Mr. Urquhart, mildly, "what difference this idea of yours will make."

"It'll make all the difference in the world," said Ted Urquhart, speaking more truly than he knew.

And so it was that he would only stay at the Court for luncheon, and then left that rose-garlanded earthly paradise, which somehow seemed more desirable to him now even than in his dreams as a wanderer, for the express up to Charing Cross, the boat-train to Folkestone, the boat across to Boulogne, and the cart that took him a jolting ten miles further to the sleepy village that was then just a cluster of fishermen's cottages, two hotels, a post-office and Debit Tabac and—Eleanor's Hostel.

Ted, carrying a walking-stick and a kit-bag patterned with a score of different coloured luggage-labels, made the whole journey in under eleven hours from the moment that he had set foot in the hall of the Court.

Such was his hurry, after a dilatory year, to face his Fate at last.

And the very next morning he did meet his Fate—with a vengeance.

CHAPTER III

THE MEETING

OF all the duties which Rosamond Fayre had so far performed in her capacity as secretary and right-hand woman to her friend Eleanor Urquhart, she most enjoyed accompanying her on that trip to the Holiday Hostel in the little fishing-village on the still so peaceful French coast.

Rosamond adored France, the land known to Sir Philip Sydney as "that sweet Enemy!" the country that even in the June before the War was friendly ground to an English-woman.

She loved to wake up to find people—different in look and dress from people at home—doing unusual things at unusual times. She loved that unfamiliar atmosphere of roasting coffee, combined with the smell of sun-on-seaweed. She loved the clack of a foreign tongue. She loved to feel that higher tide of gaiety and vitality which seems to sweep the other side of the Channel only. She loved the little village with its busy "door-step" life; she loved to see the fisher-women, in their little white sun-bonnets, sitting mending their nets in the cobbled yards; the children, with their burnt-

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straw-coloured hair cropped to the bone, shrimping for "crevettes" in the rock-pools; the smart French visitors—little girls dressed as sailor-boys, plump mammas who appeared at their hotel doors at eleven o'clock in the morning dressed in white bed-jackets, over bright satin tango-petticoats; and she particularly enjoyed all these details in the society of Eleanor's girls, upon whom they were dawning for the first time.

"Eleanor's girls," for whom the house built by an artist at the other end of the village had been converted into a Hostel, were to be brought over, six at a time, during the summer months. There were at present, however, only five of them. The sixth candidate was an English milliner's assistant who worked in a Paris hat-shop, and, as Eleanor had only heard of her by letter, and as she (who had accepted a husband by letter only) preferred to select her "girls" by a personal interview, she had judged it better to make a short trip to Paris, combining a commission of her father's with regard to some rare Rosicrucian documents with some personal enquiries as to the young shop-girl.

Thus it was that, for a whole week, Rosamond was left in charge of the Hostel and of the five girls.

Now, these girls, who were any age from nineteen to thirty, and who were treated by strict little Eleanor Urquhart as if they were children, treated her in turn as if each one of them were her devoted

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nurse. They admired her—immensely; but not for the qualities on which she prided herself; not for her managing powers, not because she could arrange with railway companies and steamship authorities to give them trips abroad on money which they could not have made go further than a week-end at Clacton, but because that sort of child-like, incomprehensible innocence of hers seemed to set her apart from them and above them. Instinctively they checked any "rowdiness," they "censored" conversation, expressions, risky songs, when Miss Urquhart was near. For in the three great divisions of girlhood one finds, in nine cases out of ten, the Potential Mother and the Potential Coquette alike ready to pay homage to the Potential Nun.

Yes; Miss Urquhart they revered—and obeyed. Rosamond they loved; Rosamond, who could trim hats for them, and play tango-music, and tell fortunes, and advise them with regard to that question of perennial poignancy—their young men.

"Miss Fayre knows all right," as one of the girls declared one day through a mouthful of liqueur chocolates bought at the Debit Tabac. This girl was a Jam-Hand, who worked at that Corner of Charing Cross Road that always smells of hot strawberries and pickles, and her costume, no matter how warm the weather, was always completed by a long black velvet coat, heavily trimmed with braid, a wide black hat with an ostrich-plume, and

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a stole of black fox. She gave the furs a toss as she continued, still munching—"Somehow you can't see anyone—except p'raps Pansy, out of cheek—talking about fellows to Miss Urquhart!"

"Yet," murmured the girl who was sitting on the sands with her in the patch of shadow cast by an upturned boat, "Miss Urquhart's got off herself."

"She has and she hasn't. Her chap's always away!"

"Anyhow—here, greedy, greedy! Have you finished the lot? I never!—she ought to understand——"

"Well, she does and she doesn't, if you know what I mean," said the Jam-Hand. The other girl, pale, slender, and wearing glasses, was one of the young ladies who work a model typewriter in a big plate-glassed shop-front under the eyes of the passer-by down a crowded City thoroughfare.

For they were of all sorts and conditions, Eleanor's protégées! With the Jam-Hand and the Typist there stayed the Salvation Army Lassie, a scrap of big-eyed, sweet-voiced nervousness, who nevertheless took the solo in street meetings, the red-haired, rather "superior" Blouse-finisher, and, last but not least of Eleanor's responsibilities, a young woman of opulent figure and with a pair of eyes that were even saucier than her voice and manner, who had played "Principal Boy" in a provincial Christmas pantomime, and who at other times was "on with the crowd" in a sketch at the "Halls."

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She was at present what she described as "resting"—but this did not mean that she was ever weary in her work of causing Miss Urquhart constant anxiety on the score of the Hostel Rules. They were few, necessary, and judicious, but to the Principal Boy they seemed to act as a spur rather than a curb.

"Pansy, my dear!" Miss Urquhart would say, quite gently, as that buxom, yawning beauty sat down to the breakfast-table with her hair, curling riotously over a dressing-jacket of flimsiest muslin and lace, down to her sumptuous hips. "I think you have forgotten your hair."

"Why! Miss Urquhart, I never get the chance! I'm never left long enough alone about it!" with a twisting of a tress that shaded from tangerine-colour at the tip to burnt-sienna at the root round two plump fingers. "Oh, if there's a thing that the boys admire, it's a nice head of hair! Now, Miss Fayre! You back me up about that, eh?"

Rosamond, primming her mouth, would look another way, while the skirmish between her employer and the Terror of the Hostel would shift ground to the subject of another regulation. No girl was to appear with powder or paint upon her face.

"But a soup-*son* of powder, Miss Urquhart! Why, whatever's wrong with that? Why, they use it for the little babies! They do, straight! Turn 'em up after they come out of their little

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tubsies and powder 'em all over—lovely! Haven't you seen 'em, Miss Urquhart? You know, at your mothers' meetin's?"

Then Eleanor, a little more stiffly: "That is different. That is not the same as your face——"

"Oh, come! Give us a chance! I know *that*, Miss Urquhart!" with a burst of rollicking laughter. "Still—! Oh, I do think a quite little baby is ser-weet (sometimes). Don't you? I could eat 'em! But if you don't keep their poor little skins nice and soft——"

"I explained the—the—the rules to you before you came," Eleanor would go on manfully, to this young person, her senior by five years in age, and by a century according to other reckonings. "P-P-P-paint——"

"No paint on me, Miss Urquhart!" virtuously from the Principal Boy. "Haven't brought a stick of it with me——"

"B-But your mouth——"

The mouth in question, large and moist and curly, opened as if to sudden enlightenment.

"Oh, *Lip-salve*! Two-and-a-half-Rose! You can't call a touch of that *paint*? It's doctor's orders"—from the unabashed Pansy. "Keeps the chaps off. No, I don't mean what you mean, Miss Urquhart——" And so on.

Before lunch-time, however, the Principal Boy would have removed the abhorred make-up, and would be having a competition for the quickest and

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brownest coat of sunburn with Annie the Salvation Lassie and Miss Beading the Blouse-finisher.

It says much for Eleanor's authority and influence that she kept the reins in her own hands, and caused these varying elements to live in comparative peace and charity with each other while they were under her charge. She was always the head of them—even of rebellious Pansy! while Rosamond, as she herself would have frankly told you, was one of themselves, even though they did call her "Miss, dear," and allow her to go first into a room.

"I do hope I shall be able to keep even that vestige of authority while Eleanor's away," thought Rosamond to herself, doubtfully, at half-past seven in the morning of the day after Ted Urquhart had turned up unexpectedly in search of his *fiancée* at The Court. "Here are four whole more days of my viceregency to run; if only I manage to keep the dear, bubbling-over things out of mischief so long! Heaven send that they don't get cut off by the tide, or drowned with cramp, or that they don't make clandestine expeditions into Boulogne"—going into Boulogne unaccompanied by Eleanor or her second-in-command was contrary to Hostel rules—"as long as I'm in charge! Girls are always breaking out in some fresh place! Pansy, having promised me as a personal favour to leave off that *mask* of powder, takes to liquid white! One comfort about them all is, that quite a nice large slice of the day's over before they roll out

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of their little beds, and I have that to the good." So she finished her *café complet* early and alone, and then strolled out of the Hostel, along the green downs where the courses of tiny rivulets were marked by meandering strips of tall mint that hid the water. She skirted a tall cliff of crumbling red earth, and passed along to the great stretches of sand bordering a greeny-blue belt of sea. Rosamond followed the creamy tide-mark of it towards Le Touquet.

As it was still so early in the morning, her hair was down, long past the belt of her white skirt, not that she shared the preference of the girls for breakfasting in uncoiffed hair, not because it was wet from bathing. Rosamond Fayre had far too much respect for her beautiful hair to ruin it with sea-water. When bathing, it was always protected by a rubber cap, the crudeness of which was concealed by the swathing of a long silk sash. But the early morning sunshine seemed to bring out all the light in that great mane, and Rosamond gave it a sun-bath as often as possible. She shook it well over her cheeks, however, so that the sun which brought lights to her hair need not bring freckles to her face.

Presently she turned, and followed the track of her own white sand-shoes back again along the water's edge. Even as she walked, she became conscious, very gradually, of a feeling of *something impending*, something going to happen. Whether

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it was a pleasant or a tragic happening, she did not know; part of the feeling was that something, someone strange had been following her, even as she walked. She was going to turn round. Then something else happened which rooted her to the sand where she stood.

Her face was still shielded by that falling golden shower, but the little pink ears under the hair caught a sound which for the moment froze Rosamond's warm young blood. The sound of a scream! A shrill, girlish voice—two voices—screaming in terror.

It came from the direction of the cliff.

Flinging back her hair, Rosamond looked up.

There, half-way between the sands at the bottom and the thymy turf at the top of the cliff, she saw what seemed for an instant like one splash of dark-blue paint, and another splash of vivid cherry-colour against the dark-red wall of earth. Two figures on a ledge that was as far above her head as it was below the cliff-edge—two girls—two of Eleanor's—of her own charges!

For that brilliant-cherry-coloured frieze coat belonged to the Principal Boy; that slender shape in blue was the Salvation Army Lassie. Yes! They had "broken out in a fresh place" after all! And this before eight in the morning!

They'd climbed up, somehow, and now they'd turned giddy and could not take another step one way or the other. Clinging like drowning insects

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to the side of a cistern, flattening themselves to the rock, shrinking as far as possible from that dizzy edge, they could do nothing but scream, panic-stricken, for help.

They had lost their heads completely. Catching sight of Rosamond hurrying along the sea-margin, the Salvation Army Lassie shrieked again :

" Miss, dear ! Miss ! "

Now, the correct thing for Rosamond to have done would have been to call back, composedly, for the girls to stay as they were, without moving or looking down, while she fetched help from the nearest fishermen, then set off immediately—a matter of a few minutes only. This is what she should have done.

The unfortunate and humiliating fact is, however, that at this juncture Rosamond also lost her head.

For a second more she stood rooted where she was. Then she took an aimless run forward ; then another backward, like those pedestrians so dreaded by drivers of motor-buses, who complicate London's traffic by their highly nervous attempts to cross the streets. Then she cried out, as helpless with terror as the girls above her, " Oh, what shall I do ? They'll fall and break their necks—I know they will— Oh—— "

Then she whirled round again, almost into the arms of someone who had come quickly up from behind a jutting-out rock, a tall someone in a blue

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blazer and white flannel trousers and with a rough bathing-towel cast muffler-wise about his neck.

"What is it?" asked a quick, very pleasant masculine voice. "Can I help——!"

It was with these six words that the situation—and incidentally the life-history of Rosamond Fayre—were broken into by Ted Urquhart.

Who—what he was, she had no time to think. Here in this solitary spot, dropped down by some special dispensation of Providence upon the sands, appeared at this awful moment a man—she scarcely realised at the moment the added advantages of his being an Englishman and a gentleman—to the rescue!

"Look!" she gasped, and pointed upwards at the cliff—at the girls perched like a couple of alien birds upon that ledge.

This man took in the situation with less than a look.

Then he spoke quickly, but unhurriedly.

"It is quite all right. There's no danger. But you must— No! Don't look up there. Look at *me*. Listen!" He had caught her arm, and, holding it, gave it a short, authoritative, and very heartening shake. "Now! You have to go up to the village by the short cut. *There*. Call at the nearest cottage for a rope. You understand? A rope. 'Ficelle' in French, I believe. Anyhow that's near enough. Make them let it down over the top of the cliff, so that I can hang on to it

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while I'm getting those girls down by the way they came. Cliff; *falaise*—It's all right. But be quick."

Without a backward glance Rosamond fled stumbingly up the short-cut.

The young man in the blue blazer began making his way, with the same unhurried quickness, up the cliff that became only gradually very steep.

After the precipices to which young Urquhart was accustomed, precipices up which men crawled like black-beetles scaling a kitchen-wall, and down which mules felt their way as if they were descending the roof of a house, this cliff of crumbling French earth seemed nothing at all. But the two London girls above there—they were in terror of their lives. Their terror was the danger—for if they lost what remained to them of their heads—looked down—let go—slid—there would be at the very least a nasty fall and broken limbs.

There was room on the narrow ledge for three. Presently Ted Urquhart was standing beside the slight form in navy-blue, which immediately clutched him as a midge will clutch at the grass that fishes it out of a picnic tea-cup.

"It's quite all right," Ted Urquhart said, again distinctly, slowly, and cheerily. "There is absolutely nothing to be afraid of. You could get down quite all right by yourselves."

"Oh, no," gasped the blue-clad girl, clutching more wildly, while the young woman beyond her added in a tense voice, "I couldn't take a step down

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for love nor gold!—and I shall begin to scream again in a minute!”

“Why not?” said Ted Urquhart briskly, “screaming’s free. Only—it doesn’t help you one scrap. Still, if you want to, do.”

This checked any further outcry on the part of the Principal Boy. Her eyes clung to the rescuer even as her companion’s hands clutched him. He went on.

“The young lady who was down there has gone to fetch a rope; it will be let down from the top.”

“Oh, I’m not going to hang on to no rope, like a spider! Rope-dancing’s not my particular line!” protested the Principal Boy, hoarsely, but with a touch of bravado now that she was fortified by something of an audience. “I’d as soon come up through the star-trap—that is, if I ever get down again alive!”

“Pooh!” Urquhart laughed, encouragingly. Then, shifting his position a little, he freed one arm from the Lassie’s clutch and put it out towards the theatrical girl.

“If you don’t mind,” he said to Pansy, “I’m going to borrow that very pretty sash-arrangement you’ve got round your waist. What is it, a sports-scarf? Jolly things, aren’t they? Girls hadn’t begun to wear those when I was last at home.”

The Principal Boy shifted her scared gaze to the scarf he had drawn from about her. “Whatever d’you want it for?”

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"To blindfold your friend here," explained the self-possessed stranger. And, almost before she knew what he was doing, the Salvation Army Lassie found that the woven, petunia-coloured scarf was being tied firmly about her terrified eyes, while the stranger went on without a break in that soothing tone of encouragement.

"Don't you know that firemen do this if they have to bring people down from a height where they aren't quite comfy? Or, if a steeplejack gets up to the top of a high chimney and thinks he can't come down—as they do, sometimes, you know,—very foolish, because they always *can* come down," said Urquhart, authoritatively.

He ran on, outwardly careless, until presently—

"Ah!—here's the rope!" he exclaimed, as there were shouts from above, and the firm rough loop dangled a couple of feet above his head. "That young lady's been jolly quick, and now I am going to be quick too. You see I take firm hold of this,"—he did so—"so that I can't possibly fall. If I slip, it doesn't matter; and if you've got firm hold of me, you can't fall either. I shall take you down first," he added quietly to the blindfolded, clutching Salvation Army Lassie, "and come back for your friend. Being a dancer, she's firm on her feet."

But the handsome face of the Principal Boy paled suddenly to the sickly, greeny-white of a guelder-rose, on which the liquid powder and the pink salve stood out in ghastly relief.

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"No! for God's sake—don't leave me!" she gasped out hoarsely, shrinking back against the wall of the ledge. "Don't leave me again! I can't stay up here all by myself. I'm shaking now. I shall look down and chuck myself over. I know I shall——"

"You'll do nothing so silly!" broke in the man's voice sharply. "Stop it!"

Then, with that peculiarly reassuring laugh of his, Ted added, "My dear girl, you're too young to die, and the stage can't spare you. I'll tell you what you're going to do. Give me your hand." He took it. "Now here's this thistle growing out of a cleft. Clutch it. Pull on that as hard as you like. They're tough beggars. And here!—in your other hand, take my watch." He had drawn it out of the pocket of his broad, foreign leather waist-belt. "Keep your eyes fixed on the hands of that," he ordered, firmly and cheerfully. "By the time they've moved on five minutes I shall be back again to fetch you. Be plucky—I know you are plucky enough to stick it out for five more minutes!" He forced the conviction upon her, too, with voice and look. "Now" (he turned to the slighter, frailer girl, who, as he had rightly judged, it would have been more dangerous to leave), "if you will put both your arms round my neck I can carry you down—yes, of course I can take your weight. The rope's got mine."

And, holding on to that rope, step by step, Ted

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Urquhart, with his trembling burden, made his way down to a less dizzy height.

"There! Now it's only a yard or two down to the sands," he said at last, "you can do that yourself, can't you, while I fetch the other girl?"

Like a cat he was up again to where the Principal Boy, with one plump damp hand grasping the thistle, stood desperately waiting, her brown eyes on the watch that he had slipped into the other hand. "Only four minutes, you see!" said the rescuer briskly, "so I'm before my time—a good fault, isn't it?—especially in an appointment with a lady. Now let that thing go—I hope you haven't got many prickles in your hands—and clasp them both firmly behind my neck."

"Ho! yes; that's a jolly good game, played slow, isn't it!" retorted Pansy, with an unsteady brightness. "All very fine for young Annie—she's got no one to worry her life out with his jealousy—don't matter whose neck she fastens *herself* round! Me with my—with my two dozen best boys, I've got to be careful. As for you, young man," she babbled on, "you give me your arm. I shall be right enough with that."

"Splendid!" said Ted Urquhart. "Hang on tight. Don't have the sleeve out of my blazer. There! That's better. Now. Don't look down, Lock at me——"

"I s'pose you—you consider you're easy enough to look at? Not but what some girls mightn't

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think so—*Ow*—” (A pebble had rattled downwards.)

“All right, all right! Feel for the niches with your feet,” he ordered. “*That’s* it——”

And as they also made the journey down, he continued to speak on, brightly, complimenting the still shaking girl on her sureness of foot, questioning her about her stage-work—anything to take her thoughts off that drop below the ledge.

“Why, the other young lady,” he concluded a compliment, “was much more frightened, you know, than either of you——”

“I daresay she was, bless her!” agreed the Principal Boy, laughing a little more naturally now that safety and the sands were coming so much nearer up towards her. “*She* didn’t want to have to arrange for no funerals from the Hostel, she being there in charge of us and all!”

“She was in charge, was she?” said Ted Urquhart evenly, as he let go the now unneeded rope and the Principal Boy dropped his arm. And now their feet were set on the blessedly hard sand. “In charge of you. Of course.”

To himself he said, “It was she! It was she!” His pulses leapt.

“I thought so,” he told himself. “I knew it, when I saw her swinging along by the water’s-edge. And it was!”

Then, with a bow to the two girls, he turned quickly away; partly because he felt badly in need

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of a drink, partly because the Salvation Army Lassie, who had collapsed on to a seaweedy boulder was sobbing hysterically in a way with which a Principal Boy might cope, but with which he felt he really couldn't; and, chiefly! because every fibre of his being was tensely strung with eager curiosity for another, longer, more soul-satisfying look at that girl, with the frightened perfect face under the golden rain of hair;—the girl who was "in charge" of these other girls at the Hostel—the girl whom he took to be none other than his own fiancée.

"She's beautiful. By Jove, she is beautiful!" was his only thought for some minutes as he strode back up the white, hedgeless road towards his Hotel. "I never imagined her so lovely—— That hair!" Then——

"Yet I always imagined her fair, the girl I would marry. Just a boy's fancy, I suppose . . . she isn't much like Uncle Henry! . . . What a golden mane! Of course Helen of Troy was golden, and Ninon, and Fair Rosamond. I am glad Eleanor's so fair. Eleanor. . . . It doesn't sound like her . . . Helen . . . That's nearer. I shall call her Helen, perhaps. . . So now I've really seen her——"

Then, exultantly, "I couldn't have hoped for a better first meeting! Bucketed head-first into an adventure, by George! Into helping her, without her ever guessing who I am! That gives us a flying start. That's luck; incredible luck!"

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He turned to glance downwards and back at the sweep of sunny, wind-swept shore set between cliffs and laughing sea ; the scene of that encounter.

"And," he thought, "it might have had to happen in Uncle's musty-fusty, dark old study, full of books and the smell of mildew and the general atmosphere of a contract ! A formal introduction—Uncle bringing her in, like a sheep to the slaughter, poor child ! '*This is Eleanor.*' '*Ah, how do you do ?*' As bald as the presentation-cup speech in that old joke—'*Well, here's the jug*'—'*Oh, is that the mug ?*' Rotten for both of us ! It would have taken Heaven knows how long to wipe out a first impression like that ! And, hang it all, a girl wants a touch of Romance in her courtship. I ought to have thought of that long ago. What I've been about all this time I don't know," thought Eleanor's fiancé. "I must make up for it now. That girl—waiting for me—sending that letter—those rose-leaves—*She's* romantic. Or isn't she ? A coquette ? Unconsciously, perhaps, or—*What* is she like, besides being lovely to look at ? How soon shall I begin to find out ? How soon can I decently see her again ? "

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST CALL

IN spite of much lying-in-wait about the sands and the wide French roads, Ted Urquhart didn't, for the rest of the morning, catch another glimpse of his golden Enigma. Disappointed, but nursing an increasing determination that the afternoon should be less of a blank, he went in to the *table d'hôte* déjeuner at the Hotel de la Plage. One fish course succeeded another. Then, in the midst of a dessert of tiny black grapes (grown on the white backyard wall of the Hotel), and of little sponge biscuits which it appeared to be the custom of the country to dip into one's glass of very thin red wine and then suck, there appeared before Ted Urquhart the "Madame" of the hotel in her tight black gown and architectural hair, who smilingly informed him that these English demoiselles from the Atelier were all in the hall, desirous of speaking to the English Monsieur.

"Ah!—Good," said Ted Urquhart eagerly.

He strode out into the bare, shady, stone-paved hall, where a knot of girlish figures, in heterogeneous seaside "get-up," were clustered, like bees on a

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head of teazle, in one corner. A buzzing chorus of talk stopped on a staccato note as the young man appeared in the doorway. For a second he hesitated, glancing from the one black coat with furs, to the coloured blouses.

Then one figure, the tallest, dressed in white, separated itself from the others, and came sedately towards him.

"Oh," she began demurely, in a voice very different from the whispering, giggling voices of the other girls, "good-afternoon, Mr——"

And she—the girl of this morning; "his" girl!—paused. It was to give him an opportunity to slip in the name by which she must thank him.

Ted Urquhart, realising this well enough! didn't give any.

"Not yet; no, not yet!" he was saying to himself. And he forced himself away from the growing temptation to stare.

He noticed how her hair, the wonderful blonde hair that had rippled down far below her waist, and had been so hastily shaken back from her face, was well out of the way now,—plaited into a rope thicker than that which had been let down over the cliff's edge, wound round her head, and hidden away under a very wide-brimmed hat of exquisitely-woven white.

In his quick glance at the girl, Ted Urquhart did not overlook that Panama hat.

For he knew it.

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"I come on behalf of these young ladies," the pretty voice was saying, half-deprecatingly, half-mischievously. "We—they all want to thank you so much for your . . . well, I don't know quite what to call it——!"

"Heroism, Miss, dear!" prompted the voice of the funereally-clad Jam-Hand. "Like the Surrey," she added.

"Well," went on the girl in charge, "may we say 'heroism'—like the Surrey?"

She met the young man's eyes, and they laughed together.

"Oh, please don't say anything of the kind!" Ted Urquhart implored her, still laughing; his eyes, full of well-leashed admiration, again upon the face under the Panama hat which he had sent, weeks ago, to Eleanor.

The girl had trimmed his gift with a silken scarf, now faded to a tender brownish-pink not unlike the colour of those rose-leaves in that letter which had brought him home on an impulse,—but he knew that was the hat.

He knew that he had written in the accompanying letter a description of how these fine hats were made, not of straw, but of the young fronds of spreading palm-leaves, and how they are plaited under water to keep them flexible, and how the little square piece in the crown is the feature of the more elaborate of them. All this he knew: he could almost see his own handwriting in that letter.

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But what he did not know was, that Eleanor Urquhart, when she had received that packet at The Court, had said, "Oh, look what a queer sort of garden-hat Ted has sent me from South America! So kind of him, but it's much too large for me—I never wear these immense shady things. Rosamond, do you care to have it?"

"Oh, rather, my dear! Any contributions thankfully received for the pauper's wardrobe!" Rosamond Fayre had laughed; "besides, this is a lovely hat for the grounds, and I shall be able to wear it all the time when we are by the sea."

And that was how it happened that she was wearing it now.

"Please don't dream of thanking me—I'm only so glad I happened to turn up," Ted Urquhart was saying. And then the girl in charge, prompted by another murmur from the group of—"About this afternoon, Miss—you know!—you ask him!"—went on sedately:

"Oh, yes! and I am deputed to ask you whether you can spare time to come this afternoon and have tea with us all? We are at the Hostel, that white house with the brilliant green shutters and the studio in the garden. It's on the right of the road to Boulogne, at the other end of the village from here, if you will come—"

If, indeed!

"Thanks most awfully," said Urquhart promptly,

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turning to the group by the door and smiling again as he met the unabashed gaze of the Principal Boy. "I shall be delighted to come!"

He meant it.

His plan, his excellent plan, was continuing to work out even better than he had dreamed.

First the flying start of this morning's adventure. Now the entrée to Eleanor's hospitality—and under such favourable circumstances! Holiday-time; a jolly little holiday place without any stiffness or formality about it. A foreign village, too; that meant an added excuse for compatriots to be very friendly. Except for a couple of Americans on their honeymoon at his Hotel, there seemed to be only French people and the Hostel party in the village. Naturally the only Englishman would soon find himself attached to the Hostel party—they were genial, sympathetic souls, these Cockney girls. And soon, the "party" also would split up into the immemorial grouping. They—he and she—would grow to be friends—more than friends, as quickly here as on board ship or on a desert-island. Everything was conspiring to help on the courtship that was now about to begin.

He congratulated himself——

Meanwhile, Rosamond Fayre also was thinking: "Well, I suppose this quite pleasant but slightly unconventional young man will now proceed to introduce himself by name?"

Not he.

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All he said was, "How soon—I mean when may I come?"

"Tea is at five," he was told. "Good-bye until then—er——"

Again a little pause into which Miss Fayre not unwarrantably imagined that he might have slipped his name.

Ted Urquhart merely echoed courteously, "Until then!"

The bevy of English girls, with a bobbing of small, bright hats, a swing of skirts, and a toss of one set of black furs, moved away from the Hotel in a cloud of white French dust.

Then a clatter of tongues broke out.

"Miss, dear, isn't he handsome?"

"Tall, isn't he?"

"Talk about sunburnt!"

"Funny kind of belt he'd got on; sort of cowboy-looking, wasn't it? Isn't he like Lewis Waller in——"

"Oh, go on, Mabel Beadling! It's always Lewis Waller, with her. Not a bit like an actor, to my mind. More like a soldier!"

"Well, he couldn't look like anything better," said Miss Fayre, whose motto from childhood had been, "*Ah, que j'aime les militaires.*"

"I wonder what he does for a living?"

"I wonder how old he is? Twenty-seven, twenty-eight?"

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"I wonder," contributed the Salvation Army Lassie, "if he's married?"

"Not him," declared the Principal Boy definitely.

"Now, Pansy, whatever's the good of saying that, when you don't *know*?" retorted the Blouse-finisher rather pettishly. "How can you possibly tell, with gentlemen? They aren't like us! *They* don't have to give the game away with a wedding-ring——"

"And a 'Keep-off-the-grass' expression," added the Jam-Hand, "and a new name! Now, when a young *girl's* still single, she's——"

"Talking of names," said Pansy, quickly, "what's his? Anybody catch it?"

No; nobody seemed to have caught it.

"Miss, dear," from the Jam-Hand, "didn't he say, when he was talking to you?"

"No," said Rosamond Fayre; meditatively, perhaps. "He did not."

"Funny of him," complained the Typist. "You'd think it was the first thing he'd mention!"

"Well, I wonder what it is? Shouldn't be surprised if it was 'Captain' Something," said the Blouse-finisher, "he'd got his hair cut that way, and that little short military moustache. It'll be in the book in the Hotel, anyway—we could always find out——"

"My *dear* Mabel! indeed we couldn't!" remonstrated the vice-Head of the Hostel, aghast. "If this—well, if he didn't choose to *tell* it

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to us, we couldn't very well go looking it up as if—— ”

“ As if we was *after* him ! ” the Jam-Hand came to the rescue. “ Miss is quite right. What's in a name ? ”

The Blouse-finisher persisted that it was queer, not knowing what name you could so much as pass him a cup of tea by.

“ And besides, I do want to know it. What am I to call him,” asked the Salvation Lassie simply, “ in my prayers ? ”

“ Probably he'll send in his card,” suggested Miss Fayre, “ when he calls this afternoon.”

Ted Urquhart, needless to say, did nothing of the kind.

Still full of the excellence of his schemes, he arrived just before five, at the latticed porch of his unsuspecting *fiancée's* Hostel.

About the base of that porch were planted clumps of ribbon-grass and tufts of golden-feather and straggles of canary-creeper ; and the lattice was gay with the monthly roses that grew from a big plaster vase placed at one side of the entrance. The vase was held up by three laughing Cupids, which had been modelled by the artist who had owned the house. Miss Urquhart, when she transformed it into her Hostel, would have had “ those not very appropriate little statuettes ” removed. But Rosamond, fearing that the flowers might not

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bear transplanting, had pleaded that the little, unabashed Loves should stay as they were.

Urquhart's ring at the bell was answered by the old mahogany-faced, snowy-capped Frenchwoman who cooked and cleaned and did the work of three English servants about the place.

But before she could request Monsieur to enter, the slight figure of Annie, the Salvation Lassie, slipped, greatly daring, before her.

Annie also had a scheme respecting names.

"Good afternoon, Sir. I'm parlour-maid to-day," she informed the tall visitor with a little giggle of nervousness; "so—*what name, Sir?*"

Mr. Ted Urquhart was not to be caught out thus. What? Held up at the door? Requested to stand and deliver?

He smiled down at the ingenuous little highway-woman.

"You don't remember me?" he said. "I am expected, I think."

Then he let her lead the way into what had been the artist's studio, now transformed by Eleanor into the Girls' Refectory.

The place was long and cool and coloured like a blade of the ribbon-grass outside. Green and white casement-cloth curtained the tall windows, the floor was carpeted with green straw matting, the white distempered walls were bare save for a framed copy of the Hostel Rules and an Arundel print of S. Ursula with her Eleven Thousand Virgins.

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(Rosamond considered that the small austere face of the S. Ursula was not unlike that of Eleanor herself, and she sometimes amused herself privately by seeking for likenesses in the Eleven Thousand, to the factory-hands or music-hall supers under Miss Urquhart's care.) A large green Brittany crook full of white Bride-lilies with streamers of ribbon-grass stood in the centre of the long table now laid for tea. At the head of it stood that supple girl in white, with the big Panama hat hiding her glorious hair.

"So this is to be our first meal together," thought the visitor. "Well, with luck! it won't be long before I shall contrive to get her to come out to tea with me, somewhere; away from all these rather alarming young women. Ah, Eleanor! Helen—Nell—Yes, that's your name—my name for you. Nell, you little think that I'm the person you'll have to be pouring out tea for every day, presently. Presently you will be sitting at a table for two, perhaps calling me by some name of your own, and——"

"Will you come and sit here," suggested his unconscious hostess, thinking "if he prefers 'you' to any other form of address for the present, so be it!"

And he sat down at her right hand, between her and the Principal Boy, who immediately took most of the burden of entertaining the guest upon her own plump shoulders. And she certainly broke

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the ice of a situation where a young, well-bred, and good-looking (but curiously nameless) man, the only representative of his sex, was being mutely worshipped as a hero by a bevy of rather self-conscious girls.

"I'll look after him," Pansy chattered, heaping Urquhart's plate, putting the sugar into his cup of tea with her own fingers, all but guiding the cup to his lips. "Oh, doesn't it begin to feel more sort of natural with a man about the house again, instead of the everlastin' hen-party? Pass those little cakes along, Mabel; they're sort of tipsyfried. Babies-in-rum they called 'em, but I daresay their bark's worse than their bite. Same as mine. He'll like those. . . . Not at all! You never find me backward in coming forward when there's boys—er—a *gentleman* to look after. . . . I don't," she concluded pointedly, "know what else to call him?"

Ted Urquhart chose to take this question as a mere statement of fact. He helped himself to a *baba-au-rhum*, smiled at his neighbour, and asked her, pleasantly, if she felt quite recovered after her little fright of this morning.

"'Little fright'?" echoed Pansy, dramatically. "Oh, girls! Oh, Miss, dear! If you'd only known my feelings-not-to-mention-my-sensations, when me and young Annie was hanging there on that cliff like the two Balancinis in that Trapeze Act! 'What had we found wrong with the ground,' eh? Oh! Doesn't it show you what's the fruits of

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getting up early because it's such a lovely morning ? Never again ! ' Such a thing as early risin' I—Don't—See ! ' " she sang. " Getting *up* ? Well ! Just as I was thinking the 'bus-conductor would be passing some rude remark about me ankles——"

The Typist blushed ; the Blouse-finisher murmured something about not the slightest use taking any notice—and the Pantomime Boy, devouring criss-cross-patterned French cream-cakes, babbled on :

" Just as I was wondering who'd break the news to Mother, up comes Lieutenant Daring the Cliff-climber, that is to say Mister—— "

She broke off abruptly. There was a pause ; the longest yet. Surely, thought Rosamond Fayre behind the teapot, surely this nameless knight-errant would proclaim his title now ? No. The indefatigable Pansy was forced to go on.

" Mister—Who ? Myster—ee, I suppose. I believe he's Royalty, travelling *incog*.—Alphonso ! Lobengula ! Oh, fancy having me life saved by a Prince ! Look well on the bills, won't it ? Better than having me jewels pinched ! Oh, when he was grabbing on to that rope with one hand and begging me to throw my arms round him, I said, ' Can a duck swim ? ' "

At this revised version of what had happened on the cliff-ledge Ted Urquhart put back his brown head and laughed infectiously.

Rosamond joined in with the other girls ; she

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laughed, but she was feeling thankful that Eleanor, safe in Paris, did not behold her theatrical protégée in her present mood. Pansy, who had been budding out of the Hostel etiquette all the week, seemed about to burst into full bloom this afternoon.

It was at the second edition of hot water to the teapot that Pansy protested that all she wanted to make her perfectly happy again in this God-forsaken spot, where they seemed to make their tobacco out o' those bits of dry black seaweed that blew about the beach, was a decent cigarette!

Smoking, in the Hostel, was strictly against rules, but ignorant of this regulation of his betrothed's, Ted Urquhart, with some relief that the name-*moti*/ appeared to be dying out of the conversation, drew out his case—a thing of finely plaited straw something like that of the Panama hat—and passed it, with a quick glance of inquiry, to his hostess.

"I don't smoke, thanks," said Rosamond. Then, firmly, "*Nobody* smokes."

A mutinous pout from Pansy. "Miss, dear, couldn't you look the other way? Anyhow——"

With the word she took the cigarette-case and turned it upside down beside her plate. A dozen or so of "Egyptians" rolled out on to the table-cloth.

"Ow! Is that all you keep in it? Sold again!" disappointedly from the Principal Boy. "*No cards, by request!* All right. Is there a spot more tea in the pot, Miss, dear, for his Royal Highness Prince Mumm?"

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Here Urquhart began to realise that the joke of a withheld name was wearing a trifle thin. Why couldn't this rattle of a girl drop it now? It was beginning to make him almost embarrassed before his hostess, it would mean more awkwardness than he intended, when he came, say, in a couple of days or so, to announcing himself by name. He had thought one could slide more easily than that over the situation. . . . It was the fault of these girls! She—Nell—hadn't shown any curiosity. But all her charges—the little thing who'd opened the door, the girl in glasses, the red-haired, and the coster-y looking ones; they were asking now, with all their eyes, what that impertinent theatrical minx presently put into so many words.

"Haven't you *got* a name, Mr. Man?"

"Come, Pansy, *Pansy*!" from the hostess.

"Well, there you are, you see! *He's* allowed to hear *mine*," complained the Principal Boy, loudly

"He knows I'm Pansy——"

"Yes; but Miss Pansy What?" fenced young Urquhart. "*I* haven't been allowed to hear your surname, after all."

"Want to hear it?" retorted the girl petulantly.

"Not," said the young man quickly, "if you don't want to tell it to me."

"Ah, that's meant for a nasty one, but our family don't take hints. *I* don't mind telling you," the Principal Boy announced. She finished her cup of tea, glanced quickly at the disposal of the tea-

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leaves at the bottom, muttered to herself, "*A short journey across the sea, a quarrel, the wedding of a friend,*" and then vouchsafed, defiantly, "My name is Hawkins."

"Oh, hark at *her!*" burst hoarsely from the Jam-Hand. "Oh, Pansy, you're worse than awful! Where d'you think you'll go to? Hawkins! Oh!" (An explosive giggle.) "Whatever next? Miss Hawkins!"

"It's not her name at all," explained the Blouse-finisher, bridling, and the Typist added,

"Her name is Miss Vansittart."

"Yes," from the Jam-Hand. "And *that's* only her stage-name!"

The Lassie ventured apologetically, "Her *reel* name is very pretty, I think; Pansy Price."

"Oh, then, you've got altogether too many names, you know. I couldn't compete with you," said Ted Urquhart, smiling at the handsome rebellious face of the girl beside him, and determined, as Rosamond Fayre realised, to keep this skirmish in the enemy's own country. "Besides," he said, "a lady's name isn't the same as a man's—"

"How d'you mean, Mr.—Er——?"

"I mean that you'll all change yours very shortly, I expect. I shall stick to mine—whatever it is."

"Evident!" said the flushed Pansy. "But—straight now"—she dropped her voice to an insinuating aside—"What is it?"

"Don't tell her!" It was his hostess herself

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who intervened, turning, half-annoyed, half-smiling, to the guest. "No; don't tell her now. Leave it at that. They've been very rude to tease you about it. Don't tell—anybody your name."

"You see? I am forbidden to tell you!" took up the anonymous knight, with a little nod. "I'm sorry, but it's——"

"Your score. Chalk it up and I'll be round with the money in the morning, Mr. Nought-nought-double-O-Dot," retorted the Principal Boy quite good-naturedly. "Change the subject—seems to be the only change a girl can get out of *you*!" Then she began to rattle on again, this time about that bouquet of flowers on the table.

"Smell a treat, don't they? Whatever's that stripey stuff you've stuck in with them, Annie?"

"That's ribbon-grass," the Lassie timidly showed off her knowledge from the other side of the table. "At home they used to call it '*Match-Me*,' and play a game with it—seeing who could get two blades striped just alike——"

"Oh, yes, we know those games!—If it isn't Match-Me it's Shy Widow (I don't think!) or Postman's Knock," from Pansy. "Always end the same way! Always finish in your finding yourself let in for a kiss to the wrong young man!"

And she concluded audaciously to the only young man present, "Is this where we start playing it now?"

"Isn't this where we all go down to the shore?"

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parried Urquhart, smiling pleasantly at her, "and see if there's any phosphorescence on the waves this fine evening?"

His quickness was rewarded by a quicker glance of half-amused gratitude from the blue eyes of the girl at the head of the now rifled tea-table—and then, with a pushing aside of chairs, and a babble of—"while I get my new ta-ta on"—"Miss, dear, can I come out as I am?"—"is it cowl?"—"no, you can't have my furs! Leave off!" the girls disappeared out of the Refectory, where, in spite of wide-thrown windows, the air seemed close and still vibrating with clatter, to the upper rooms of the Hostel.

Ted Urquhart was left to wait for them in the cool garden outside, where the round-limbed plaster Loves laughed under their burden of roses, to smoke his deferred cigarette and to revise his impressions of the girl who would soon, he found, be settling down very naturally and rapidly to her appropriate place in her *fiancé's* heart.

"Mischievous, though. Just brimful of mischief," he decided. "Every bit as much so as the other hussy! Only hers—Nell's—isn't allowed to bubble over. It's all tucked away—takes cover under that hat, I suppose. Watch that mouth of hers when the girls she's shepherding say something that she's simply got to appear shocked at—"

He gave a short laugh as he turned up the path again and flicked a bit of ash off on to the broken

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shell t. served for gravel. "Mischief! It was all part of it—her writing to me, long ago, that she hadn't a photograph, didn't bother to have herself taken, as she always came out so badly. Badly? She was hoarding up her looks, deliberately. Meant to spring a mine upon me, when I did come home, with her beauty and—and herself!"

He glanced, as he walked past, at the striped cascade of Match-Me grass beside the porch.

"And her little prunes-and-prismy letters! Jove! The first one of all—'My dear Ted—Father and I both think that it will be the best thing for me to accept your kind offer' (of marriage, forsooth), and the others, the seedsman's catalogue and the list of fixtures at The Court, and the—she *must* have been laughing to herself as she wrote that letter! Now, I wonder what on earth sort of a young-man-not-in-a-hurry she thought she was writing to? I wonder what she thinks—whether she thinks anything at all yet, that is, of *me*?"

Rosamond Fayre was at that moment in her bedroom, changing her house-slippers (always to be worn indoors at the Hostel, Rule 8) for her white canvas beach-shoes, and thinking quite busily about the guest of the afternoon.

And her first impression of him was, frankly, that she liked him very much indeed. Yes. For a number of reasons she considered him (in the bald, but comprehensive summing-up of girlhood) "nice."

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To begin with, of course, his looks. His build and make, his alert movements, his graceful height, the breadth of his flat shoulders and the way his rather small head was set upon them—these things pleased Rosamond's eyes, and through them, her sense of what a man should be as well as look. He was active and fit and hard as nails. Now *he* looked the sort of young man, she thought, to rush up and down the Andes, making no more of the castings upon his shoulder than a porter carting a kit-bag upstairs, like that weird sort of a *fiancé* of Eleanor's—to whom, by the way, another letter would have to be sent off in a couple of days. Only, keen as he seemed over his engineering and his camp-life, Eleanor's *fiancé* was obviously a laggard in love. This young man, Rosamond decided, would not be that. She liked the quick grey glance of his impatient eyes—patience in a man being one of the quite numerous virtues which Woman respects and loathes. She liked the "Service crop" of his brown hair and the tan of his face and the short moustache that was scarcely darker than that tan, and that hid nothing of the firm line of his lips. Decidedly good to look at. Such a nice voice, too, thought Rosamond, tying the white strings of her shoe.

The right sort of clothes, too. As old as the hills, but *built*. He'd changed the blue blazer and waist-belt and white flannel bags of this morning for grey tweed things with an unstiffened white

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collar fastened by a plain gold safety-pin under a tie of deep-blue knitted silk.

" I wonder if . . . anybody . . . knitted it ? " she broke off.

And she liked the way he wore the clothes, also that leather strap about his wrist, and the very old silk handkerchief that had faded to the brown of an autumn leaf, and—several more of the little details, the omission or achievement of which, young women were noticing at the time that young men fondly dreamt that they—the girls—were being profoundly interested in what happened at the seventh hole, or in Ulster ; what a man like Lloyd George was actually driving at, or what had been the policy of their particular firm, up to now—

If the youth had but known !

It doesn't matter now, of course, since there is now always the one topic, the War, for maid and man. . . .

This young man, besides being agreeable to look at and to listen to, possessed that Something to which girls who are sisters pay tribute. (In a two-edged remark which sometimes also means that they, personally, find a young man hopelessly uninspiring !)

" The boys would like him."

Rosamond Fayre, remembering the brother dead in his early twenties, thought " Yes. My dear old boy would have liked him ! "

How nice he—the visitor—had been at tea !

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Some young men might have "taken advantage" in some tiny, imperceptible way of Pansy, who was *rather* appalling when she let her high spirits run away with her like that. Rosamond was almost as grateful to him for his behaviour this afternoon as for that of this morning.

How ripping and "on the spot" and dependable he'd been this morning!

Rosamond found that she utterly approved of everything she'd noticed, so far, about—his name? What about that name of his? M—m, *well*!

Well, he'd missed his opportunity of getting it in at once, of course. Afterwards, of *course* he wasn't going to give away the name at which such a dead set had been made by the girls! Serve them right that he'd faced round and begun to tease them!

Rosamond was glad she'd interrupted, when he was just going to give in. She was glad she'd said "Don't tell anybody your name!"

"Because he'll know," she reflected, as she closed her bedroom door, and ran downstairs to join the group in the porch, "he'll know that when I said 'anybody' I meant 'anybody except me.' He'll have to tell *me* when we get down to the shore, of course!"

CHAPTER V

THE NEW MOON

GROUPED in the hostel porch, the other girls were chaffing, in whispers, the Principal Boy.

"Well, you had all the luck! Not a word or a look for any of us!" they complained. "You were the one, Pansy!"

"Me? Nit," declared Pansy, winking in a fashion for which she had been more than once gently taken to task by Miss Eleanor Urquhart. It was a wink epitomising the experience of five crowded years upon the boards. "*Me* indeed!"

"Now, just *hark* at you again!" protested the Jam-Hand, huskily. "You weren't half getting off with your Lieutenant Daring the Cliff-climber, oh, no!"

"Getting off? Scored off, you mean," scoffed Pansy. "Played off, more like!"

"Played off?" queried the Typist hopefully. "Played off against who?"

"Oh, you get the call-boy to wake you up when it's time for you to come on!" laughed the Principal Boy, under her breath. "D'you mean to say you

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weren't on to that inside of half-a-minute at the Hotel this afternoon? Who d'you s'pose *he's* here for? Don't strain yourselves guessing. I'll show you presently."

What she showed them presently (when, taking the slim Annie by one arm and Mabel Beading by the other, she drove the Jam-Hand and the Typist, also arm-in-arm ahead of them, along the stretch of beach below the sand-hills) was Miss Rosamond Fayre, with the young man who had been their guest of the afternoon, walking along (but not arm-in-arm) some distance behind.

Perhaps they walked more slowly than they knew. And for perhaps the sixth time since their first breathless encounter of the morning that now seemed such ages away, now in the soft gathering dusk above the sands that had been so dazzlingly sunny, Rosamond found herself thinking, "*Now!*"

She waited for him to speak.

He spoke. He said, "Don't you think it's a bit too cold for it?"

"Cold," repeated Rosamond, "too cold for what?"

"Why, for the phosphorescence," he explained, turning his eyes to the water's edge, where the waves came tumbling in nearer and nearer to the last tide mark. Now one ran up in advance, filling with water the hollowed tracks left by the girls ahead; then swirled back, leaving a stretch of smooth brown mirror in which gleamed the reflections of a pearl

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and apricot sky, a towering sunset cloud, the point of light from a single star. "I don't think we shall see any to-night."

"There was some a night or two ago."

"Ah, yes," said Urquhart. "But I only came over last night."

This, thought Rosamond, was the opening. But he didn't go on. Very well! To return, while he sought for another opening, to the subject of the phosphorescence.

"It looked like summer-lightning on the waves," she told him. "All pale green—wonderful——"

"Ah, but you don't really get enough of it just in the shallow waters here, and in these cool climates. The French coast in August is no place for the real thing," returned the young man. "Right out at sea—in the Tropics at night—that's when it's 'wonderful.' The wake of a ship, where it looks as if she'd turned up a furrow of silver fire as the plough turns up earth. That's where you ought to see it from," he told her, thinking, "and so you shall, and soon! Wait until I carry you off on a honeymoon-cruise round the world, Nell! What would you say to that?"

The girl whom his increasingly venturesome thoughts were addressing as "Nell," said composedly, "Yes, it must be rather delightful to be able to travel, like that."

"It *would* be, you darling," responded Mr. Ted

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Urquhart promptly—but not aloud. So that she still waited for him to say something.

His next remark was more or less an excuse to check their advance for a moment, while the others—their chattering young voices raised from time to time in snatches of musical comedy song—swung on further ahead. Young Urquhart, standing still on the sand, pointed out to the apricot-shading-to-pearl sweep of sky above the tumbling waves and said "Hullo! The new moon."

"Oh, yes," said Rosamond politely, following his glance at the curve of thin silver over the rim of an indigo cloud. "So it is."

"Doesn't that mean that one ought to curtsy, or bow seven times, or touch gold, or something?" asked Ted Urquhart. And in spite of his care to keep his voice as well under control as his eyes, a shade of difference crept into his tone with the words, "Isn't one supposed to get a new moon wish?"

A shade of difference of another sort was to be detected in the tone of Miss Fayre's "I believe there is some old superstition of the kind. It begins to grow dark quite soon now, doesn't it!"

"Ah, putting me in what you consider my place, Nell?" This was her companion's mental comment. His spoken one was "Yes, and yet it seems only a few days since we were at the longest day."

To-day had seemed sufficiently long and crowded to Rosamond Fayre. Yet this young man didn't

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appear to find time in it to remember the most rudimentary beginning of his manners. After all her "of courses " he was *not* seizing this opportunity to let her know his name ! Here he was strolling by the lacey hem of the waves on the sand and at her side, and the most obvious thing to say remained unspoken. He merely asked if those were the Boulogne harbour-lights that one saw down there to the left ?

" Yes." (Did he imagine they were the Lights o' London ?)

" And it's not so much further along to Wimereux ? "

" No," said Rosamond Fayre.

Here two white-clad figures that had been walking along the sands behind them overtook them, with a cheery " Good evening ! " to Urquhart, who lifted his straw hat. They were the Americans, the honeymoon couple from his hotel, and the little bride gave the swiftest glance of sympathetic interest at the other couple as they passed.

" Why, Lucius, if it isn't that perfectly lovely girl from the Hostel with the nice-looking Englishman from the de la Plage that asked you for matches," she murmured to her own escort. " Now, how thrilling ! Don't they just look *fine* together, with their reflections in that wet sand below them and the new moon just over their heads ; isn't it a *picture* ! May their own moon rise soon," concluded the just married girl, happily, " for it's easy to see what's doing *there* ! "

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She might not have come to this conclusion—or, again, she might—if she had overheard the dialogue at that moment halting along between this likely-looking couple.

"I believe there are good links at Wimereux," Ted Urquhart said. "Do you play golf?"

"No," said Rosamond Fayre.

"Do you go into Boulogne much?"

"No," said Rosamond.

"I expect you find quite enough to do in this place?"

"Yes," said Rosamond.

"Baggage! I recognise the style of your letters in all this. There's an end coming to this kind of thing though, the very first time I manage to get you to myself—really to myself—for an afternoon," said Urquhart—but not aloud. Aloud he said, "Ripping places for picnics, I should think, all about here."

"Yes, I should think so," agreed Rosamond politely. "I think we ought—as our old lady likes getting our supper over early—I think we ought to be going in now."

It seemed to him that he was allowed only another second of walking beside her, stealing sideway glances at her through the silver-blue gloaming, before she had recalled and collected her chattering flock—before they were again gathered about the entrance to the Hostel, gleaming ghostly-white in the dusk. The light through the Refectory windows

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pointed a bright, mocking finger across the shrubs, across the shelly path to the provoked and eager and impatient face of that young man outside the gate of twisted iron-work, holding his hat with his walking-stick in his left hand.

Rosamond had only bowed as she said (still as politely) "Good evening!"

"Good-night," said Ted Urquhart shortly.

But whatever else he had chosen to say as he turned away, he could scarcely have made Rosamond Fayre feel very much angrier with him, than she was already feeling at that moment.

Rude young man!

Horribly rude!

What earthly reason could he have for keeping his absurd name (whatever it was) to himself? It made *her* feel so ridiculous!

For instance, when she told Eleanor—as she was, of course, bound to tell Eleanor—about that escapade of Annie's and Pansy's on the cliff, and how they owed their foolhardy necks to a young Englishman who had—et cetera, what could she reply to Eleanor's natural first question of "Who was *he*?"

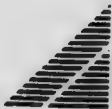
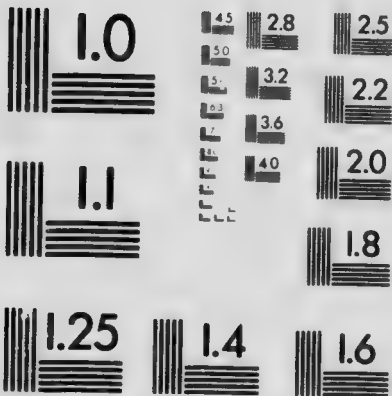
"Oh, he didn't tell us who he was. He came to tea with us afterwards, and he went for a walk on the shore with us, but he didn't give any name—"

"Really?" Rosamond could imagine the little line between Eleanor's brows at this. "How very odd!"



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Precisely !

Well, she (Rosamond) couldn't help it. It had nothing more to do with her. The young man with the deep cleft in his firm chin had rescued two of the girls ; he'd been thanked, he had been asked to tea and had been entertained (by Pansy). Everybody had said " Good-bye " to him quite nicely just now, he'd gone, and there was no reason why Rosamond should think any more about him.

Thinking of him as she presided over the girls' supper of cocoa and *charcuterie* and bread and butter cut from yard-long French loaves, Rosamond admitted to herself that the young man with those very white teeth had at least one saving grace. He hadn't tried to worm himself into their society under an *assumed* name ! Rosamond *had* heard of people on holidays who had tried to do this. Really horrid young men, of course. Not the sort of young man that one could feel at home with in every other sort of way, as, to do him justice, one might have done with—but he'd gone. Probably he was off to Wimereux to play golf on those links to-morrow. Why waste another thought on him ?

Another thing about that young man with the frank and laughing eyes, thought Rosamond after supper, when the Refectory table had been cleared and the girls had gathered round the piano to sing to the accompaniments that Miss Fayre could play

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Without notes, he had *seemed* to wish to be friendly and sociable in every other way. He might—if he'd only been sensible—have had quite a jolly time, picnicing and going for excursions with them all; with the girls, with Eleanor when she returned in four days' time, and with herself. He'd only himself to thank that he wasn't going to see anything more of the English contingent while he was here, and that they weren't thinking of inviting him again—or thinking of him anyhow!

The thought with which Rosamond Fayre amused herself as she unwound the golden rope of her hair that night and brushed it into a shining shawl over her nightgown was "supposing the reason was that his name was so hideous or so funny that he didn't like me—us to know it!"

She laughed and mentally ran over all the ugly or ludicrously sounding surnames that she had ever heard.

"Hogg . . . Dolittle . . . Mr. Prate . . . Carrotts . . . Gotobed . . . Tombs! And there was that new butler at The Court whose name Mr. Urquhart simply had to change to Beeton. His real one was '*Beetles*.' Heavens! Fancy marrying a man called Mr. Beetles. Still, it wasn't *his* fault (the butler's, I mean). It was only his affliction. The type of mind that would make fun of a man because of his surname," concluded Rosamond Fayre, dividing the gold on either side of her face, "is the

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type that would laugh at a little child in irons. And as I shall never know what his is, why worry about it any more ? ”

Going back to the subject as she nestled her pretty head down into the pillow with Eleanor's clear marking of "URQUHART. HOSTEL. 1914," it struck Rosamond that it was rather a pity that there was to be no further opportunity for snubbing that nameless young man. Hadn't he rather put on "side" here and there? Hadn't he been just a tiny bit "superior"? About that phosphorescence, for instance? "In the Tropics at night . . . that's where it's so wonderful!" As much as telling her, Rosamond Fayre, that nothing *she'd* ever seen could compare with a man's wider experience. She was glad she'd been so very distant about the New Moon.

That moon had set hours ago; only starlight watched the flat Normandy lands, the leafy garden outside her window. Every evening now the moon would grow, though. How glorious when it was full moon over the sea here! "Silver fire" of phosphorescence in the tropic seas through which the good ship ploughed her way—Pooh!

Thinking of him and——

But here Rosamond Fayre fell off to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

PLAN—AND SUPER-PLAN

UPON a morning that was bright as a diamond, bracing as a sea-dip, blue-and-white as Canterbury bells in the Hotel garden, Mr. Ted Urquhart told himself again that this golden weather was sent by a kind and match-making Providence for the special purpose of speeding his courtship.

To-day should not be wasted, as he had had to waste, through no wish of his own, yesterday and the day before.

For he had seen nothing further of "that perfectly lovely girl from the Hostel" since the evening when she had not even vouchsafed him a handshake for good-night. The day after he had caught just a glimpse of the whole party packed into some French vehicle that passed for a wagonette, leaving a wake of shrieks and chatter and laughter along the white road to Boulogne. In Boulogne itself he hadn't managed to run across them for all his search in patisseries and cinemas and the *galeries* where you buy—or *did* buy in the dim ages before the War—scent and soap and silk

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stockings. The following day all he had seen of the party had been another fleeting glimpse, this time of a vision of *hats*—a black, feathery cart-wheel, a small petunia-coloured helmet of satin, and a shady Panama—below sandhills. A few yards further on were a white straw "shape" with a gaily flowered band, a Saxe-blue linen sun-hood, and a Salvation bonnet with its lettered ribbon. All those other young women, confound them! She was forever surrounded by them! Yet *another* hat! a chic, Watteau shepherdess affair, massed with blush roses—close to another, a man's straw hat. A *man's*? Who the dickens—Ah! Urquhart had felt distinctly relieved when he realised that the two last hats also belonged to people he'd met; to the honeymooning Americans from his Hotel. They'd been picnicing with the Hostel party. Urquhart couldn't very well join them. . . . It would have looked too much like forcing himself upon those girls! Yes. The young honeymoon couple—strangers to her—were allowed to make themselves at home in that sheltered corner below the sandhills with her. And he—who'd every right and reason to be at her side, he, her lawful *fiancé*, so to speak, he couldn't claim a look-in!

A pretty Lenten sort of engagement his had been so far!

But never mind. To-day he meant to take the bull by the horns. He meant to walk straight up to the Hostel, and, no matter who opened the

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door to him, demand to see Miss Eleanor Urquhart for one moment alone.

He wouldn't go until he'd achieved that moment.

And then—then he'd plunge for it without any more of this infernal beating about the bush! He would hold out his hand and look her straight in the face, that sedately-provoking, mischievously proper, flower of a face of hers. He'd say, "How do you do, Eleanor?" ("Nell" could be kept for later on.) He'd say, "I ought to have told you before. I'm Ted. Now don't pretend you can't imagine who *that* is" (she'd be certain to make the attempt), "and don't ask '*what* Ted?' " (This would be just like her.) "You know perfectly well.—*Your* Ted."

Then, no doubt, his *fiancée-in-spite-of-herself* would proceed to make his life a burden by her demure gibes at his behaviour of two days ago. She would—well, never mind. The ice would be broken. There'd be an end of that insolently formal small-talk about the longest day and the weather. He would know where he *was*—that is, he amended, as he grasped his walking-stick as if it were the hilt of a fencing-foil, she would know who *he* was; and—here he felt, as one turns to a friend, for his tobacco.

Hereupon he realised a diurnal tragedy of Man's life; the ever-recurring catastrophe in two words—"No matches!" He'd long come to the end of the one box of English ones that is allowed to the

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traveller by an Argus-eyed Customs-house System—to the end, also, of the other six that he'd managed to smuggle over, and he hadn't brought with him out of the Hotel a box of those beastly spluttering foreign things. . . .

This was why he turned into the little low-roofed, double-doored Debit Tabac. And here he found another customer, twirling the revolving stand of picture post-cards under the hanging clusters of string-soled shoes, and endeavouring to make the French youth in charge understand by shouts and gestures her resonant Cockney English. She wore her gaudy petunia-pink coat and the small helmet hat that was itself rather like something of a picture post-card. For under the hat there beamed a welcome, the shrewd and powdered face of that pride of pantomime, Pansy.

"Hullo, N. or M.," she said, spinning round on her heel. "*Quite* a stranger!"

"Hullo!" said Urquhart. "Good morning."

"Nothing wrong with the morning," admitted Pansy. "Now, young man—you other one, I mean, in French! I'll have this of The Plage, and these two of the landing-stage," waving the cards in his face, "and you might get me out this one—No, no! *Not* that. Want to get me into trouble with my pal the English Postmaster-General? This other one! Here! This with the forget-me-nots and the heart, and the hand, writing. That's it—Are you coming along?" she added to Urquhart,

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when the cards, enclosed in a flimsy grey envelope, were handed to her by the young Frenchman with the invariably courteous bow, which she acknowledged by carrying her hand to her satin casque in a military salute. "Coming along with me?"

"Er—yes," said Ted Urquhart. "I think I am walking up a bit of the way with you."

The Principal Boy, swinging along at his side up the cobbled, coffee-scented street, turned suddenly upon him and remarked, "No luck, had you?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Ow! As man to man, now!" Pansy mocked him with another toss of that hat and that tangerine-tinted hair. "You know what I mean! Didn't meet our Miss Anybody early on the beach this morning, did you?"

Ted Urquhart, surprised and amused, paused a moment to debate within himself whether to treat this remark as a joke or to pretend that he didn't know what this astute young Cockney was driving at. He glanced at her again. No. Not worth while to put up pretences against the snap of those brown eyes. Besides, presently she and the others would know that he was, definitely and officially, engaged to be married to their Miss Anybody, their young Lady Warden.

So he said, as frankly as if quite a long conversation on the subject had already passed between him and the Pantomime Boy, "Meet 'anybody'? No. I didn't."

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"Had a good look, I suppose?"

He laughed.

"*Had* you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," admitted Ted Urquhart, still laughing, "I had."

"Good!" said the Principal Boy. "I do like anyone who'll come straight to the point. Too many fellows just *won't*. To keep *to* the point, I dessay you're fairly bursting yourself to see her again to-day?"

"Well?" said Urquhart, defensive, but smiling.

"Well, you don't want all the others nosin' round and gaping and taking in every remark that's passed——"

"I do not," agreed Ted Urquhart fervently, with another frank glance at the face she turned up. At the back of that broad crimson-and-ivory smile he recognised a real wish to help. . . . Well! Why not make use of that invaluable asset to courtship, the feminine ally?

"Look here, Miss Pansy," he began. "If you'd really—I'd be jolly grateful—If you'd only——"

"Anything, Mr. Never-mention-it——"

"If you mean my wretched name," he said quickly, "give me another half-day, will you?"

"Why, if that's *part* of it——"

"It is," said Ted Urquhart truthfully. "It is part of it."

"Right-O, mate. Then you listen to me," his new ally went on quickly as they came to the end

PLAN—AND SUPER-PLAN

of the street where the last cottage was an overturned fishing-boat on a patch of common ground.

"This is our Leading Lady's afternoon for writing letters. She'll be in the house from two till five o'clock about. We shan't."

"Where shall you be, then?" asked Ted Urquhart, falling without further ado into this scheme for his welfare. "Which side of the beach?"

"Hardelot," planned the Pantomime Boy. "I'll cart young Annie and those other two off there, and keep 'em out for tea, even if we have to pull through on that black-currant vinegar they bring you with a fancy cake. Must have a bit o' fun *sometimes*. The coast then being clear, Captain Swift decides to march up to the Hostel to ask for his handsome silver-mounted walking-stick which he was *careless* enough (ahem!) to leave behind him when he called."

"But I'm afraid I wasn't," objected Ted Urquhart, vexed that he had not remembered this good old rule, this simple plan, for himself. "Afraid I've got it here——"

"Oh, well, if you will have it!" flounced the young woman who'd addressed him as mate. "Oh, some people do take a lot of helping! You'd come off pretty badly at a stage-door, you would. Here! Oh, give it to me!"

And the plump hand of the Principal Boy snatched the walking-stick away from him, whisking it inside

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the cherry-coloured coat, where she carried it off as a poacher carries a short gun. Ten minutes later that silver-mounted walking-stick of yew-tree wood, was reposing among the stack of umbrellas, shrimping-nets, and gay Japanese parasols in the hat-stand of that shaded convent-like hall at the Holiday Hostel ; waiting to play the small, but not unimportant part for which it had been cast in the drama of an August afternoon.

Rosamond Fayre, having waved a rather envious farewell to the merry party setting off across the downs to Hardelot, sat down at the window of the little room beside the porch, and turned with a sigh to her correspondence. The morning's post had brought from Miss Urquhart in Paris a sheet of notes of instructions for her clerk. Rosamond, sitting at the bureau, looked them over again.

- (1) Write back to the C.O.S. saying I cannot entertain their proposal.
- (2) Find out if Nellie Clark, under-bodice hand at Shoddy and Frillings, is taking her holiday the last week in August or the first in September.
- (3) Ask Lady M. about clothes for that Jumble Sale in October.

Over the fourth item Rosamond had, as usual, smiled a little.

- (4) Write to Mr. T. Urquhart for me. Same address as last time. Tell him what we

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have been doing in France, but that he'd better write to me as usual at The Court. I shall have to be at The Court off and on, and am returning to take Father those MSS. after I bring Edith Winter to the Hostel, either to-morrow or day after. Shall come back to the Hostel again on the 16th.

- (5) Write for that estimate for re-painting and decorating the Canning Town Crèche

Five letters to write ; actually six. For there was another letter of which the envelope was scrawled over with several addresses, the first one being to the Hotel Midas, London. It was in the cash-desk of the Midas that Rosamond had been found so providentially by her present employer. The Midas people had sent the letter on to her old lodgings, who had forwarded it on to The Court, whence Mr. Beeton, the butler, had sent it on to France. And Rosamond had recognised the handwriting inside with a not altogether unaffectionate touch of contempt. . . . Still? He still remembered her? "He" was the lad who had shared College rooms with her brother, who had begged her to write to him, who had afterwards implored her to marry him. Even if he had been five years older than he was, Rosamond would still as soon have thought of engaging herself to an infant out of one of Eleanor's crèches. He was rather a sweet boy, but he was of the type that

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remains to the end of Time some woman's unrewarded and devoted dog.

He wrote :

" My dear Miss Fayre,

" This is my second letter to you. One was sent back to me at Oxford. I heard that you were working at the Midas. You ought not to be working. I was horribly upset. I went there and they told me you had left. Will you please tell me where you are and what doing ? Mayn't I come and see you ? I won't bother you. I swear I won't. Please won't you let me come ?

" With kindest regards,

" Ever yours,

" CECIL BRAY."

" Do please say I may come and how soon."

It was a pity, Rosamond thought, that men didn't seem able to strike a happy mean between opening out their whole hearts like a pedlar's wallet on the ground before you, like poor dear Cecil,—and adopting the attitude of the Male Aloof, too lofty or absorbed, or—er—something—to have anything to tell you about themselves, like——

Here the bell rang and Rosamond glanced up from her bureau, out of the window.

" Good gracious, *he's* come back," thought Rosamond Fayre, swiftly at the sight of the figure standing on the path. " And there's Madame Topp

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gone to the fair at Portel, and I shall have to go to the door—in this blouse. It's always the way. Whenever one tries to be truly economical and to wear out one's old clothes in private life, somebody not entirely uninteresting is absolutely certain to call!" And bitterly resenting that blouse, she went to the door.

Upon Ted Urquhart the facts that her blouse was a very ancient "has been," with marks of iron-mould upon it, and that her skirt had been a friend of that blouse's youth, were entirely lost. He only realised that the girl framed in the doorway looked daintier in the flesh, than she had done in his dreams of two days; with a deeper rose-colour than he remembered in her soft cheeks; and that his heart seemed to take a leap forward at the sight of her.

Rosamond, for her part, frankly admitted to herself that she was very glad to see him. She hadn't really snubbed him properly the other evening—and he was the sort of uppish young man who really *calls* for snubbing.

He had called, it seemed, about a walking-stick.

"I am always forgetting something," he told her. "Thank you, so much. Yes. That's the one, with the rather fat knob. Thanks so awfully much!"

"Not at all," said Miss Fayre, looking "Good-bye."

But apparently he had just been struck by an afterthought.

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"Oh, look here ; I say ! I wanted very much to—er—to give some sort of a return little party," he began, " after that tea with you on Tuesday. I—you do have tea out-of-doors sometimes, don't you ? Think I caught sight of you with some people from my Hotel yesterday."

A non-committal " Oh, yes ? " from Rosamond. He went on.

" So, if you wouldn't be too awfully bored. That is ! Do you think you—and all the others could come and have a picnic tea of sorts with me under the rocks below le Portel this afternoon ? I've got a Thermos, and sandwiches and things. And as it's such a ripping day, I—I do hope that you won't refuse me—— "

" I am afraid—What a pity ! " said Rosamond Fayre sedately. " All the girls are out. They went twenty minutes ago. They are having tea out."

" I say, how unfortunate ! " he said. " Have they gone into Boulogne again ? "

" Boulogne—without me—is out of bounds," Rosamond told him. " So they've gone to see what sort of ' pictures ' there are at Hardelot." She gave him the conventional smile that is the unmistakable paraphrase of " Good afternoon."

But Ted Urquhart had laid plans that were proof against hints and snubs and cold-shouldering on the part of this young lady. She was going to come out with him. She was going to be taken to the

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nearest sheltered corner under the rocks, that was out of the way of the everlasting fisher-children with their maddening demand for "un p'tit sou!" Then he was going to break it to her *who* it was she was going to pour out tea for that afternoon. Also to-morrow afternoon. Likewise on Sunday. Similarly on Monday. And presently for good. Then, perhaps, *then* she'd have the grace to look a trifle less provocatively self-possessed. He went on conversationally. "Oh, they've gone to the Cinema? Imagine spending an afternoon like this nipped in to red plush chairs in a stuffy tunnel, making one's eyes ache with staring at moving pictures of 'Fool's Head Looping the Loop,' when one might be enjoying oneself."

"They are enjoying themselves," Rosamond corrected him. "People have different ideas of enjoyment."

"I know. Mine, to-day, is out-of-doors; even if the breeze does blow sand into the butter," smiled Urquhart, without troubling any longer to keep the "do-let-us-be-friends-now" tone out of his voice. "And I think we shall have the best of it."

Rosamond Fayre, speaking without meaning to do so, demanded, "Who are 'we'?"

"Why—why, you and I, since we are the only—*What?*" took up the young man, ingenuously, as if a sudden thought had struck him with dismay. "Do you mean—*You'll* come and be the picnic, won't you?"

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"I?" said Rosamond Fayre. "Oh, I don't think so. No."

Ted Urquhart, blunt as a boy, but in a way at which no one, she realised half-resentfully, could take offence, demanded, "Why not?"

Now there were so many obvious reasons why she should not think of going, that Rosamond Fayre could not, at that moment, remember them. So she looked up at the presumptuous young man who had coolly demanded the afternoon of her. And she protested, "I—I have too much to do before post-time. Five or six business-letters to write!"

"Half a dozen letters won't take you two hours," he persisted. "Look here! It's only half-past two. I'm certain you can get all those business people, whoever they are, written to by four o'clock. Now, can't you?"

"Well—er—" she hesitated. "Really!"

"And my picnic was to have been at half-past four. Now, look here——"

(Here he nearly slipped out a "Nell.")

"I'll call for you again," he concluded, firmly, "at four o'clock."

Rosamond Fayre shook her bright head.

"That—wouldn't do," she said, but she smiled a little, and with each syllable resolution dropped from her. Involuntarily she glanced over his shoulder at the road to the shore. Never had sunlight and sands seemed so golden, or sea and

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sky so sapphire-blue, or the air so headily fresh, or she herself in such perfect tune for an outing. If her work were done, she would in the natural order of things go down afterwards to the sea's edge. Why not with this young man who had, after all, rendered an untinkable service to the employer, in whose place she, Rosamond, now stood? Suddenly she remembered something. That predecessor to Miss Fayre, the secretary who had been dismissed because she had slipped out in the evening to meet the chauffeur in the rose-garden! But what had that to do with it? *That* was so entirely different. So different that it made up her mind for her. So she added, brightly and conventionally, "Four would be too early. But—if you really don't want to give up the idea of the picnic, come at a quarter past."

"Good!" said Ted Urquhart briskly, and went.

He went back to the Hotel, where, in the Hall, he exchanged greetings with the little Dresden shepherdess of an American bride, who was sitting on the wooden settle busily arranging her tea-basket for two; a case of handy, expensive-looking toys, all silver tops and Bond Street leather.

"Jolly basket you've got," said Urquhart.

The little bride glanced at him over it.

"Do you want to borrow it?" she suggested with a sudden roguish twinkle under her Watteau posy of a hat, "for the afternoon?"

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"Why—how do you mean?" said this bachelor, nonplussed. "Borrow it——?"

"To take . . . Anybody out to tea with," she concluded with a dimple. "*We'd* be real glad to lend it!"

"Here's another," thought the disconcerted Urquhart. "Two of 'em in one day talking about Anybody. I shall have to be more careful."

"Won't you have it? Now, do!" said the just-married girl, kindly and simply, and held the basket out to him with both hands.

"Hang it, then, I will!" he thought, and took it with a laugh and a "Well—Thanks awfully!"

The dainty American gave him a smile that was a wedding-present in itself, and fluttered off to her Lucius; while Urquhart, kicking his heels against the white-washed wall opposite the Hotel, took out his cigarette-case—and his watch. It seemed several hours before those hands crawled up to a quarter to four.

"I couldn't have stood much more of all this," he decided presently. "Now, I wonder if she's going to give me a very bad time—first? In a way, after all, I've been practically spying on her. Pretty rotten way of behaving to a girl, in any other circumstances. But she is my own sweetheart, when all's said, and she's going to know that now. I shall be thundering glad—only five minutes to four?—when it's off my chest."

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He studied the handle of that very new tea-basket.

"Besides," he thought, "what about my privilege as an engaged man?"

(It was not the first time that the thought had struck him since he set eyes on Rosamond Fayre.)

He thought, as he started off down the road, "I shall have to beg for it and let her take her time about all that." He found himself hurrying ridiculously, and checked his pace. "Yes, I shall be all the more humble because, actually, I have the right to take that girl of mine into my arms and to kiss her as I choose!"

CHAPTER VII

CHECK !

AT five minutes past four he was back again at that white-walled, green-shuttered Hostel, that seemed now as familiar as if he'd spent years of his youth there.

Upon the broad sill of the open window beside the porch, a still damp bathing-costume of scarlet silk was spread out like a "DANGER" flag. Inside, that girl of his was still sitting at her bureau, writing. He was about to apologise for being a little early, when she raised her small, burnished head on its creamy neck and said, quietly, "Oh, you have come back. I am very sorry, but I am afraid I am not coming out with you this afternoon, after all."

What ?

"Not coming ?" He stared blankly at her. She was putting a letter into an envelope ; to her hand lay two or three other letters, addressed and stamped ; also, his quick glance took in, that the envelope of a newly-torn-open telegram lay upon the bureau.

He said quickly, "I say, I hope nothing has

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happened ? I mean, I do hope you haven't had any bad news——"

"Oh dear no," broke in Rosamond Fayre, quickly and lightly. "Nothing of the kind."

"Then why—— You said you'd come. You promised."

"I know," she said, and a coldness seemed wrapped about her, hiding the sweetness and colour of her like a suddenly-risen sea-mist. "But I am not coming."

"But——!" He stood there dumbfounded against that background of pink roses and plaster-white laughing Cupids with the blue blink of the sea beyond the garden. "If I may ask, why not?"

"Oh! I changed my mind," she said.

Urquhart for a moment did not trust himself to speak. He thought, "Talk about those refractory mules we had such a fearful to-do with, that time in Montana! Tractable and reasonable and sweet-tempered, compared to a woman! All right!"

He picked up his walking-stick.

"Good afternoon, then," he said, and wasted no time in further leave-taking.

"Please!" added the girl, raising her voice a trifle as he turned. "Do you mind posting these letters for me as you pass the box by the cross-roads?"

"Not at all." He took the three or four letters, of which she had laid one rather carefully on the top of the others.

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"Thank you."

He was out of the gate without even a look.

Tingling with disappointment, astonishment and rage, Ted Urquhart tramped back to the cross-roads where he had parted that morning from that resourceful match-maker, Pansy.

Not much of a success—her plan!

What on earth was the meaning of all this?

Nell's look at him! Her tone! That *curt* snub!

After her promise!

"Changed my mind——!"

What had happened to change it between his leaving her, at half-past two, and his reappearance just now?

Was it that wire?

She said there was nothing, though.

Changed her mind!

Sent him to the right-about, carrying this dashed tea-basket, and her letters to post.

Pretty cool, that last touch!

Her letters, indeed! He scowled down at them. Then his brows rose. The address in the curly, clear handwriting upon that topmost envelope, forced itself upon his recognition. He had seen it so many times already.

"To

E. Urquhart, Esqre."

To himself!

Nell had been writing to him. That very after-

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noon. While the man to whom she wrote was perhaps within a stone's throw of her !

He stood still in the road, staring at that envelope. . . .

With a hoot of derision, a big touring-car went scorching softly by him on the way to Hardelot ; tossing a dazzle of brass into his eyes, a smother of white dust all over him. He merely blinked, and stared at that envelope. . . . A couple of fisher-girls passed him, their voluminous stuff petticoats swinging like kilts, their high, stiff corsets, covered in corn-flower blue cloth, clipping them over their white bodices. They called a friendly " Bon jour ! " to Urquhart.

He stared at that envelope addressed to him. . . . " Now *what's* inside ? " he thought. So familiar was each letter of the writing that he could make for himself a mental copy of the sheet within, as far as the date and the Hostel address and the " My dear Ted."

And then what ?

Anything that would explain her behaviour just now ?

If he thought that—It was almost enough to tempt a man to open—A letter addressed to him, *meant* for him to read !

Yes, but not now. No, dash it. A man couldn't. She'd given it to him to post. The thing, whatever it was about, would have to be posted and reach

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him after much wandering and many days. He made a rough calculation.

"Eight weeks, perhaps," he thought. "It'll turn up, readdressed, at The Court. Ah! With luck it will have to be readdressed from The Court again, and sent on somewhere else, supposing I was—supposing we were off by that time, on our honeymoon. After all, we're engaged——"

The sun-tanned face cleared. He started off again, and presently smiled down with increasing cheerfulness at that unbetraying grey envelope.

"Probably this is a description of the scenery of this place, and about how the phosphorescence on the high tide in the evening is like summer lightning on the waves!" he reflected. "Telling me what is to be found flourishing in the Hostel garden. . . . H'm . . . Cupids and 'Match-me'! Possibly some ultra-meek version of those girls and their cliff-adventure, and of the young man—some stranger—who. . . . Or wouldn't she? Wouldn't Nell mention *him*?"

He had reached the black-and-white post-box in the wall which the facteur, even in that tiny hamlet, visited thrice daily.

He dropped in the three other letters, held his own in his hand for another moment.

"It'll be something to smile over when we do get it," he told himself with a half-amused, impatient sigh. "Well! So long!"

And, with a "final" sounding little click of the

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iron flap, he dropped into the box his letter from Nell.

Her fair face, proud, withheld and lovely, rose above every other image in his mind. Again he saw her, sitting there at that window writing ; her supple white hand on the green cloth of that bureau. . . .

Suddenly, irrelevantly, he remembered something else about her. The first thing any woman would have looked for. He—an engaged man—had only subconsciously noticed it, and had then forgotten all about it.

He remembered now.

For though Eleanor had written back to him at the beginning of their betrothal that she had decided upon no new stones, but that she would wear an old Urquhart heirloom of a sapphire with brilliants for her engagement-ring, he was sure that the girl, sitting writing to the *fiancé* whom she believed far away—the girl wore no ring at all.

CHAPTER VIII

CROWS TO PLUCK

FORTY-EIGHT hours after that check to his courtship, Ted Urquhart was speeding back to The Court, fetched over from France by a message of two words—

"Eleanor here."

It found him only too anxious to believe that it had been sent off by that enchanting tease, Nell herself.

He hadn't had another glimpse of her since the afternoon that he had planned to spend in making himself known to her—and that he'd actually spent in finding himself put further away from her than ever.

Now she'd sent for him.

Oh, the interminable homeward journey!

Centuries, it seemed to him, were spent in pacing a stone quay, waiting, waiting until that never-ending luggage and those motor cars were got aboard. Other ages in watching, from the steamer-rail, how slowly the tall hotels of Boulogne began to slide away as the boat lifted to the Channel waves. Further æons of time in tramping a short

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deck cumbered with long chairs and with other passengers—who grumbled, perhaps, at the idiotic restlessness of that young fellow in the brown Burberry, striding up and down as if that could bring him any sooner to his destination, with a pipe between his teeth and that unmeaning smile coming and going on his face.

For all the way home he was thinking of her. . . .
“Why,” he wondered, “did she take it into her head to be off, when she was to have stayed at that Hostel for a month? By this time, of course, Uncle Henry will have told her that I’ve been there, too—when I went—and why I went. The chances are that she knows now who it was she snubbed and sent away like that. She knows it’s the man she’s got to meet this afternoon as her *fiancé*!”

Pictures of his waiting sweetheart rose between him and the foam-veined jade of the water sliding past the boat. He saw her—not, as before, on the *plage* of a foreign country, with waves at her feet and a young moon above her head—but in another setting altogether, adding her beauty to the beauty of his old home—(her home—ah, theirs!). Coming slowly down the grey stone steps of the—(their) Terrace. He would make her take him round her—(and his) gardens. Then, as she stood reflected among the other lilies in the still waters of that new fish-pond of hers (and theirs) her lover, close beside her, would proceed to teach her a lesson or so about a thing or two.

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These were the anticipations that kept that smile flickering on the young man's face.

"Now then! I have a crow to pluck with you—several crows, in fact. A whole row of 'em," Ted Urquhart imagined himself saying peremptorily to that girl of his. "Look here! To begin with—*Where's your engagement ring?* You promised you'd wear one," he'd say. "And you don't. What's become of that sapphire you said you'd chosen? (Matches your eyes, I expect.) Where is it?"

She'd have some impertinence ready. Then—

"Certainly I want you always to wear it," Urquhart would go on (if this dashed sea-slug of a boat ever got to the other side). "Yes. If you fetch it I will wish it on to your finger, and you need not take it off again. No! You needn't run away for it this minute, thanks. Presently will do," he'd say. "After I've plucked another crow with you first, please. Crow Number Two:—*What did you mean by promising to spend the whole afternoon tête-à-tête by the sea with a strange young man?*"

Here, of course (thought Urquhart), Nell would protest that he could scarcely have the assurance to call himself a strange young man?

"Yes! You didn't know, at the time, that I was anything else," he would insist. It would do her good to be bullied about it. Didn't they say that women preferred a man who could bully them?

"The crime remains the same," he'd say, "as if I

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had been a perfect stranger. A stranger who saw no ring on your finger! An unfortunate chap who'd absolutely no idea that you were an engaged girl! Nothing to warn him! Disgraceful. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Nell? Why, you death-trap! Think of the mischief that you might (*might*, mark you!) have been doing all the time," he'd say. "Think of the possible damage to that wretched young man. He couldn't guess that the pretty, unattached-looking young woman who said she'd come out to tea was already booked to make a marriage of convenience!" Yes, he could say it then; Nell would be perfectly aware what sort of a match theirs was turning out! And her lover would go on severely——

"Supposing this ignorant stranger had taken it into his head to fall in love with you at first sight? Some—young lunatics might be capable of that. Supposing that, in all good faith, he'd proposed to you?" he'd say. "No thanks to you, Miss, that that catastrophe happened to be out of the question. But here's Crow Number Three:—*Having given your word to the man, what made you break it? Why didn't you keep that appointment?*"

Here, he thought, he'd have Nell in a cleft stick!

For already he'd pieced out what he thought the reason for that sudden coldness of hers to the strange young man. The remembrance of one Ted Urquhart, whom she was to marry, had hinted that it wasn't wise to encourage this sort of thing—

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picnics and so on with young men who couldn't, perhaps, keep their admiration entirely out of their eyes. She'd have to own her duty towards her *fiancé*—which meant owning that "the strange young man" was at least important enough to count! She wouldn't say that. Urquhart would drive it home with——

"Crow Number Four:—*Why aid you give him your letter to me to post?* Wasn't it so that he might see you'd got a man of your own to write to—Yes, well, of course he wouldn't necessarily see that it was to a *fiancé*. Of course it might have been to a father or a brother. Leave that crow for the present, then. Still, you did stick that letter on the top of the others for him to notice the address," he'd say. "Now, didn't you? . . . Didn't you, Dear?"

Here her lover pictured Nell's first gesture of hesitation. He imagined the first undecided sideways turn of the small head (soon to be drawn down to its proper place on his shoulder), bright as a golden bud against the treillage of the old rose-temple!—their rose-temple!—to which he would be slowly strolling along beside her, a lovely girl in a lovely place!

What did the place matter, though? All that mattered was summed up in the two words of her message——

' Eleanor here.'

Still he was not disappointed that, after a fuming

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wait at Folkestone and a journey through Kent in a Victorian railway train that had, as Urquhart expressed it, "two speeds, dead-slow and stop," he found at the tiny station for The Court no Nell to meet him.

He had not wished or expected that.

Only he commandeered the wheel from a morose and public-school-voiced chauffeur and tore his Uncle's car along homewards at a pace that made white avenue and green lime-trees whizz past in strips of white-and-green, like blades of that ribbon-grass.

And now they'd rushed up the drive; they'd turned by the huge beech to the Terrace with the shallow-worn steps between grey Court and green lawns. Now! Here was Home! *Their* home! He'd arrived——

One glance at the steps—No! She wasn't there——

Well, of course not——

Much more like her to withhold herself until the last minute! Possibly she thought that *he* had to be taught a lesson? That it was she who had crows to pluck with *him*? And that he must wait on her, first? Right!

She'd be in the house——

Impetuously he dashed up those steps, out of the late afternoon sunlight, into the gloom and the cool of the old Hall, nearly knocking that officious butler into the glass case with General

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Urquhart's giant tarpon that stood beside the study door.

In the study he found his Uncle, craning as ever over those books of his, difficult as ever to uproot from that printed Past and awaken to the Present—embodied in a hurrying lover.

"Ah, Ted! You have come back," the old man informed him, vaguely, pulling a lock of his own white hair back with groping fingers. "You got my telegram."

"Oh, yes, Uncle—Thanks!"

H'm. So the wire was from him? Nell wouldn't send it?

"Still, she might have dictated it," thought the younger Urquhart, his eyes turning to the door that he had left ajar.

The old man shut it carefully.

"Always a draught from that hall! The worst of an old house! Yes, I wired as soon as Eleanor came back from France. She wasn't able to secure those documents. Only the least important of them. If one wants a thing properly done, Ted, one has to be on the spot oneself. It isn't always possible, I know. But writing—sit down, sit down—writing about a thing is seldom satisfactory. The delay—the waste of time——"

"I know—I know—three years!" said Ted Urquhart.

"Ah, you've found it so, too? I verily believe that everyone says the same thing. But I thought

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—I thought that you always transacted whatever *you* had to do yourself, my boy, in those out-of-the-way places? I suppose you've had to write home for things, though, and that you'd have managed better if you could have chosen in person——”

“Not I! I should never have chosen differently, Uncle,” declared Ted Urquhart quickly, his mind gay with images of the golden-haired girl he called his. “If Eleanor——”

“Ah, yes. Perhaps you would like to see Eleanor now——”

“Perhaps!” the young man laughed, flushing a little.

The elder Urquhart rose stiffly from his desk-chair.

“She said she would come down here as soon as she heard you had arrived, my boy,” he said, slowly, and put that hand like a branch of pale coral out to the bell. “She was to be in her office all the afternoon. That little room off the drawing-room: she calls it her office. She has so many people to see on business; she has to have an office of sorts, Ted——”

“Of course, of course——”

A nerve-racking pause, during which an old man and a young one sat silent in the old room with its book-lined walls, arrased with velvety glooms. Outside a rose flattened itself against a mullioned pane. Inside brooded a church-like hush.

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Young Urquhart felt that the thumping of his heart must presently be heard through it.

"Crow Number Five to pluck with her presently," he thought resentfully. *"Why did you keep me waiting on thorns when I know you must have heard the car drive up?"*

"Dear me, I think that bell cannot have rung," said Eleanor's maddening father, presently. He rang again.

After what was possibly only the usual lapse of time, the butler appeared.

"Beeton, go—go to the little morning-room, will you, and let Miss Urquhart know that Mr. Ted Urquhart has come and that he is waiting in here."

"Yes, Sir."

Another stage-wait.

Mr. Ted Urquhart, with every nerve a-fret within him, remembered that a married man he knew once told him how nearly he had "bolted" from the altar and the bride who had let him in for the ordeal of waiting there for fifteen minutes. . . .

This was a bad quarter of an hour that Nell was giving her man. . . .

How long? How much longer? . . .

Ah! At last! Steps across the hall.

Urquhart sprang up again at the sound of them.

Light, composed-sounding steps; not loitering, not hurrying, coming steadily across to the study-door.

It opened.

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As it did so, young Urquhart stood tense, just ready to step forward to greet the girl who should enter. . . .

But he did not step forward.

For, he saw, this was not Nell who came in.

She, in her dainty insolence, had *sent* somebody.

This would mean the plucking of Crow Number Six. She had sent a small, dark, prim-faced little person, rather dowdily-dressed, a companion, a lady-secretary or something of that sort, to say that Miss Urquhart would be here presently, he supposed. Nell was keeping it up until the very last moment——

But in that moment old Mr. Urquhart's vague, soft voice was speaking ; uttering incredible words.

" Ted, my dear boy," he said, " this is Eleanor."

" This—? " The startled, crude exclamation all but broke from young Urquhart's lips. All the blood that had just been surging, warm and eager, through his heart, seemed to have ebbed away, leaving him deathly cold. He was aghast as any ivy-wreathed lover of Mythology, who for a day had chased some laughing and elusive maid in hot pursuit—no more eagerly than this Twentieth Century engineer in his tweeds and brown boots and close-cut hair—and with no better luck ! For at the end of the chase, what, in those old legends, was the hunter's reward ? That disconcerting miracle of Metamorphosis ! The glowing sweet-heart vanished ; transformed into a chilling splash

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of brook-water across his face—an armful of fleshless reeds against his breast——

Young Urquhart stared. A voice within him seemed to be clamouring furiously :—" But, look here ! This isn't Nell ! It can't be ! This isn't the girl I'm here for, at all ! This is the wrong one ! *The wrong girl*, I say ! "

Unconscious of all this, the strange dark girl came sedately towards him, holding out a small hand, spare and brown as the stone of a date. Upon the other she wore a noticeably fine ring.

" How do you do, Ted ? " she said, composedly. And she offered to him the edge of an olive cheek—this girl upon whom he'd never set eyes before now !

This was Eleanor !

CHAPTER IX

THE WRONG GIRL

"**H**OW am I to get out of it? What excuse am I to make? *How on earth am I going to break off the engagement?*"

This was Ted Urquhart's first preoccupation after he had dismissed Mr. Beeton's offer of help and had begun to unpack his own traps in the lavender-scented quarters which had always been his bedroom when as a little boy he had stayed with his father at The Court. He could still hardly realise that The Court was his own property; that it would be his and that of the girl-cousin whom he had arranged to marry.

No! He couldn't marry her!

Now that he had seen her, he knew, he knew that he could never marry Eleanor Urquhart!

The small and naughty boy that lurks in every grown-up young man seemed to come out from his ambush at the back of his mind, grimacing and shrieking rebellion at the mere thought of it.—
"Don't want to! Don't like it! Shan't! Won't!"

However more gently he put it, it was a rotten

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thing to have to tell a girl! What reason could he possibly give her? The young man pondered as he moved in his shirt-sleeves between the towering tallboys and the latticed casement darkened by ivy, unpacking and disposing his things neatly and quickly after the order of the old campaigner; the row of boots here—best light for shaving here—and here the spirit-lamp arrangement for getting himself a cup of tea in the morning at an hour before any lazy English servant was stirring!—and as he pondered, there sounded clearer and clearer in his mind the unwelcome answer to his question.

"How am I to break off this senseless engagement?"

"It can't be broken off!"

For he couldn't tell that matter-of-fact-looking young woman that he found he'd been mistaken in his feelings! In the whole question of their engagement, "feelings" had not been mentioned.

Why should they? Between a girl and a man who'd never met? They were engaged for quite another motive—and that motive—the sharing of The Court—remained; commonsense as ever. He would, if he broke it off, be turning out the girl and the old man—after having deluded them for a whole year into making sure they were there for good! He'd be wasting a year of his cousin's chances of marrying somebody else. Somebody else might have wanted to marry her—a curate,

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say, or some kind of professorial pal of Uncle Henry's. . . .

So here was he—Ted Urquhart—with his whole Future mortgaged !

And only himself to thank for that ! Asking for trouble ! Asking !

Fool that he'd been !

Didn't it just show the insensate folly of getting oneself engaged for any but the one right reason ?

Men did it, of course, and it seemed to work out all right. . . . There'd been a young French mechanic in Urquhart's last camp, married to a girl in Arles for whom he seemed constantly homesick—yet he'd never seen this bride to speak to, alone, until after the wedding. Those "arranged" marriages for family reasons, on the idea that one well-brought-up girl made a man the same sort of wife as another well-brought-up girl, panned out well in France, presumably. One young Englishman was finding it a fairly infernal sort of failure. To be tied for life to a girl who—Well ! She was a nice little thing enough. Rather fine eyes—for Clark eyes

But—he summed up a vague set of impressions by ruefully telling himself that she didn't seem able to make you feel she *was* a girl ! Pretty hopeless kind of start, that.

Some girls—not always the best-looking ones—had something about them that could surely make you conscious of their attraction even a mile away and on a pitch-dark night.

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Men married, however, without that sort of thing, and were quite reasonably happy. A man needn't miss it—until, too late, he happened to meet the other sort of girl——

Here Urquhart sat down heavily on the edge of his bed—one of those countless mausoleums in which Queen Elizabeth is reported to have slept,—and he thumped a brown fist softly and viciously against the carved black garland of the bed-post.

As if defending himself to someone, he muttered aloud—"It would have been all right! It wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't seen Nell first!"

He knew now who it was that he had been calling "Nell" all this while in his heart.

For during a nightmare of afternoon-tea just now in the great drawing-room with his Uncle and the girl whom Ted had condemned himself to marry, Eleanor Urquhart's staid little voice had broken through her *fiancé's* daze of consternation with questions, obviously meant to be friendly, about that anonymous, that disastrous trip of his to France.

"And so you went to my Hostel, and found that you had had a journey for nothing, after all? Oh, dear, what a pity. I should like to have shown you the place myself," Eleanor had said, pouring out tea with those little, competent, rather uncaressable-looking hands. She was doing her best, he saw, to be what she considered "nice" to this

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visitor who was also a prospective husband.

"Sugar? Two lumps? (I must remember.)

Don't you think it was a good idea to start it abroad,

Ted? Such a complete change, you know——"

"Quite a change," poor Ted had absently agreed.

"Yes, to give those girls even a glimpse of another country, another sort of life from their own—Oh! I am sure it widens their minds," Eleanor had said earnestly. "It is sometimes *so* disheartening, the narrowness of the outlook of those girls! Some of them seem to care for nothing but just the tiny pleasures of the moment. Or what they look like. Or what one of their dreadful 'young men' says; their Tube lift-men and tram-conductors and shop-assistants! As I sometimes try to tell them—(Won't you have some more bread-and-butter? You are eating nothing.)—as I tell them, 'These young m-m-men are, in nine cases out of ten, on a lower mental plane than you are yourselves! They haven't read as much; they haven't associated as much with another class; they haven't thought as much. Why, why be swayed by their opinions? Form your own judgments!' I tell them, 'For the honour of your sex, be yourselves, not things that just talk, and dress' (as they do, Ted), and behave in a way that they think will please their quite uncultivated young men!'"

"But these young men," Urquhart had suggested, diffidently enough, "are, I suppose, all those girls have to marry."

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"Why should that decide everything?" Eleanor had argued, as energetically, as unembarrassedly as if she were discussing any other subject—say half-day closing—that affected her girls. "Why should not they—instead of descending to the level of the young man's intelligence—try to raise him? I beg them to do that. Isn't that a better standard to set?"

"Oh—quite—" Urquhart had said, with an irrelevant echo of the talk of Pansy ringing in his mind as he had listened to this other young woman.

"And you saw my girls, of course? Five of them there now. They wouldn't know who you were, Ted, I suppose?"

"Er—no. They didn't know."

"Not even Miss Fayre?"

"Miss Fayre," Urquhart had repeated with a boding flash of enlightenment. "Now, which was she?"

"Rosamond Fayre; a very tall girl with a great deal of fair hair; nice-looking—my secretary. I left her in charge of the place while I went to Paris."

"Ah, your second-in-command. Yes, I saw her, of course," Eleanor's *fiancé* had forced himself to say quietly, "but without catching her name."

"Then you will have to be properly introduced when she comes back," Eleanor had said, pleasantly precise, "on Thursday."

"She's—to come back here?" Ted Urquhart

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had heard himself ask. "And are you going back to France, then, yourself?"

"No. I've another most excellent person to send over to take on the Hostel until the end of this month. A Lady Miriam Settlement worker, whose holiday has fallen through in the nick of time," Eleanor had explained busily. "A Miss Wadsworth—a great-niece of The Wadsworth, you know, the Minority Report man—a most charming and cultured woman. She will be glad to take charge—especially as the more *difficult* of the girls are due back now—and that allows me to have Rosamond Fayre free for the Amalgamated Girls' Garden Party."

"'Rosamond Fayre!' Rosamond Fayre," Ted had echoed silently. "She was more like a 'Nell'! And so she's this girl's secretary? What on earth sort of a—Rather a bad one, I should say! What's she secretarying for, at all? Is *she* one of that 'intelligent' lot? Surely she doesn't go in for thinking a girl ought to be mugging up books all day about how to be 'herself,' instead of playing up to a mere man?"

But as he asked himself the question he knew that to that girl being "herself" and living to her lover delight would some day mean just one and the same thing. . . .

Eleanor, putting her cup down, had chatted briskly on, so interested in this garden-party, whatever it was, that it preserved her from any

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self-consciousness before this stranger-*fiancé*. She had been quite ready to accept him as a matter of fact! She'd behaved as a well-brought up docile child behaves when there is ushered into her nursery "the new Nana"! She had been treating her prospective husband with the same unruffled friendliness with which she had then turned to his Uncle.

"I knew you'd resign yourself to the inevitable, Father! As soon as we heard that there was scarlatina at Park, and that the Duchess had to put the whole place into quarantine, I knew you'd say we might have the party here——"

"Very well, my dear, very well—I'll go out for the whole day," Mr. Urquhart's fatigued voice had replied. "I'll take the car over to Little Merton. and have a look at that parish register I heard of the other day. No, no, I'll not stay here, Eleanor. I—I can't cope with these young ladies. I—I haven't forgotten that last reunion you had. Ladies who lost their way down the corridors—invaded my study—lectured me on the Marriage Laws. They alarmed me," the old gentleman had confessed, "with their views—They—Ah, I shall be gravely anxious, Eleanor, until they have come and gone. The pictures, Ted!—The Romney! At least we ought to have the Holbein room locked up!"

"But these are not the Suffrage-people, father, this time," Eleanor had explained, patiently.

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"These are just my working-girls! All the Clubs in London, amalgamated. They are bringing down——"

"Female hooligans, my dear Ted," concluded his Uncle with a deploring shake of his white head. "Mænads who hold orgies and Saturnalian gambols on these lawns——"

"Father, they only dance! Dancing is their great outlet," Eleanor had explained. "I shall have a band for them on the Terrace. I shall tell Rosamond to write to one of those ladies' orchestras——"

"More ladies!" old Mr. Urquhart had groaned. "Ted, my dear boy, you and I will be well out of it on that day. We will decamp, and leave the Bacchæ to Eleanor and Miss Fayre."

That miserable night, as Urquhart went to sleep, his last thought was that he would see Miss Fayre—since that was Nell's true name—in two days' time. . . .

It seemed to Ted that only that thought kept him going at all during his ghastly sojourn in this house as a man engaged—to the wrong girl. It seemed to him, as he walked through those grounds and stood beside that new fish-pond, and explored the rose-temple, always with that sedate and authoritative little courier of a cousin of his—as he touched her cool olive cheek in morning or evening greeting—and listened politely to her talk of her plans and

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of her secretary's duties, it seemed to Ted that Life could hold nothing worse in store for him.

Here he was mistaken.

To be with the wrong girl is bad enough ; but its Purgatory is peaceful enjoyment compared with what it immediately becomes with the entrance upon the scene of the right girl herself.

CHAPTER X

THE OTHER GIRL

ROSAMOND FAYRE, secretary, returned to her employer's house on Friday evening.

It was just as Beeton was preparing to sound the dressing-bell that the tall girl, coated and veiled from the motor, came running lightly up the steps and into the hall, to be met by Eleanor, over whose compact little shoulder a masculine figure might be seen lurking, none too happily, in the background.

"Ah, Rosamond, you are late," Eleanor greeted her pleasantly. The girls never attempted a kiss; Eleanor, because she would not have considered it business-like to be on those terms with a salaried clerk, however much of a friend she was; Rosamond, because, like many girls of a generous temperament, she was sparing of indiscriminate caresses. (In dreams her kisses might be many . . . in real life she waited for—a dream. . .)

They shook hands, and then Eleanor made a little summoning movement of her dusky head. The young man behind her straightened himself and

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came forward to that long-evaded, now inevitable introduction.

"A surprise for you, Rosamond," said Eleanor, smiling placidly. "You two have met, I hear, but without either of you knowing who the other was. This is my *fiancé*, Mr. Ted Urquhart."

The young man—rather wooden-faced—bowed to Miss Fayre, who, without displaying too much astonishment, gave the lightest laugh of conventional amusement as she nodded.

"How funny this is," she said brightly, "isn't it? How do you do, Mr. Urquhart? (We entertained your *fiancé* unawares, Eleanor, that he was wishing us all at the bottom of the sea because we could not produce the rightful mistress of the Hostel to talk to him.) Yes, a perfect crossing, thanks. What, a parcel in my room? How nice! I always like to find something unexpected waiting for me, don't you?"

She stood a little aside to let her employer precede her upstairs, then she went off to her own room, smiling.

That smile deepened as Rosamond opened her white door and stepped across the pretty room to the open latticed casement. The sunset was misty golden beyond the dove-coloured sweep of Kentish Weald with here and there a church-spire holding up a slim blue finger; the lime-trees of the Court Avenue made a dark frame for the picture. It was all utterly, unsuspectingly peaceful; and very

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English. After all, Rosamond found it was rather pleasant to be back again in England.

That was not why she smiled, though.

"So that's Mr. Ted Urquhart! He little knows that I have known that for nearly a week now! He shall never know how I found out, either," decided Rosamond with a little laugh.

And as she slipped off her travel-dusty costume and splashed in freshening hot water, she laughed once or twice over the pictures in her mind. A picture of the hall at the Hostel and of the walking-stick that a young man had dropped there while he went off post-haste to fetch a tea-basket, and that a young woman had, suspecting nothing, picked up. A tell-tale walking-stick with a big silver knob engraved with initials, and a crest for all the world to see. Not the sort of stick a young man ought to carry who's set his mind upon travelling incognito!

Then the picture of Ted Urquhart's straight back as seen from the Hostel window, marching off with indignation expressed in every line of it! The picture of his face just now!

"So that is the young man of the Camp, and the runaway bulls, and the revolver fights, is it? That's 'my dear Ted,' in fact, to whom Eleanor—or I—used to send off those extremely interesting letters every mail? What a grotesque plan that was." She laughed as she unwove her plaits and

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twisted them again into the Clytie knot on the back of her neck.

"And how I used to wonder what he looked like, this unseen young man to whom I signed myself 'His affectionately.' Well, I know now. And he doesn't know I've seen most of his—er—love-letters." She laughed again. "How furious he would be! He is furious enough with me now," thought Rosamond Fayre. "I saw that. Furious because I had to hear his name at last. Furious because a third person knows of that silly, silly trick he played—tried to play off on his *fiancée*! She doesn't seem to be particularly angry," reflected Rosamond. "I shouldn't have spoken to him for weeks, if he'd been anything to do with me. As it was, I was rather annoyed with him for the moment. Not now. Oh, no! Now I'm only interested to watch him—and Eleanor. They've had a week, now, to find out each other's tastes, and so on . . . I *suppose* he likes her? I expect he'll loathe me cordially henceforward."

She hummed lightly a scrap of an old song as she finished doing her hair:

"My father's a hedger and ditcher—"

It's getting late in the summer to dress for dinner without turning on the lights——"

Catching together her blue crêpe kimona, she stepped across to the window again. With a little jingle of brass rings she drew the cream-coloured casement curtains, catching as she did so, the sound

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of a crunching step on the gravel outside, the whiff of a cigarette.

"Alone. I wonder what he's thinking about. Waiting for Eleanor to come down, of course," said Rosamond Fayre as she stepped back.

Behind those drawn curtains she snapped on the lights. They shone on that waiting parcel, a square white carton box with a dressmaker's name ("Madame Cora") splashed in scarlet letters across it, containing a new evening frock for Miss Fayre, who spent what Eleanor privately considered an utterly disproportionate amount of her salary upon clothes.

"I wonder what Eleanor is going to put on 'for Him'?" mused Rosamond as she sat down on the bed and cut the scarlet strings of the box. "Surely she'll stop having a soul above dressing to please a man now? Lots of girls could take Eleanor's looks and make them rather Spanish and piquante. But will she?"

Layer after layer of tissue paper rustled at her feet with the sound of drifted autumn leaves.

Rosamond took out the frock.

It was of three-tiered pink, fading from the deep blush of the lowest flounce to the creamy heart of the corsage, and but for the shot-weighted hems it would have seemed light as a silken scarf across her arm.

"Now there's something really mysterious about a woman's pretty frock that's not been put on

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yet," thought Rosamond. Her eyes drank in the dainty colour. "She doesn't yet know what will happen to her while she's wearing it. How can Eleanor call clothes '*so inessential*'? A frock? Why, it's a fateful thing! Now, this——"

She stepped into the pink sheath.

"Will it be an unlucky frock? A hoodoo? Some are!" She drew it up about her pliant column of a body. "Or will it be a 'frock of fascination' that brings a good time whenever or wherever it's worn? Perhaps!" She slipped sculptured arms into those short transparent sleeves. "Oh! Feels like crisp butterfly's wings against one! Yes! Surely Eleanor will learn to enjoy clothes for his sake? Surely he'll teach her that? Though I don't think much of him, even if he does romp up and down the Andes with castings on his back. (Obstinate-looking back). Now, which is the—ah, here——"

She joined the silken waist-belt, humming her old song:

"My father's a hedger and ditcher—

My mother must card and spin—

Fancy when they spun all their own frocks!"

With busy enjoyment she fastened silver snaps down the front, still humming——

"But I'm a poor little critcher—

That's it——"

She coaxed a tiny hook into a silken loop,

"And money comes slowly in!"

THE OTHER GIRL

Now ! ”

She turned to the long glass of her wardrobe a glance of triumphant enquiry.

Yes !

It was a success.

Ah, blessed fashions of Nineteen Fourteen, that revived all the frilly, feminine vanity and charm, with none of the rigidity of the Crinoline Period ! That corolla of petal shapes spreading below the hips as the girl that lent it movement turned slowly, lifted an arm, took a step aside and back again ! Why, this garment was just a flower made into a frock ! She smiled with frankest pleasure at her own white-framed reflection. And the last cunning touch was to overlay it with that film of misty-blue chiffon which softened all that warmer colour with just the quality of pink rose-leaves !

“ My frock ; distinctly mine ! ” murmured the girl. “ I’ve never looked so nice in anything. I’ll write and tell Mrs. Core that. Clever little woman ! Worth double what she charges. It *is* nice ! M—m ! ”

She pursed her mouth into the shape of a kiss wafted to that preening, radiant image of gold-and-white-and-rose.

“ Rather a darling ! The frock, I mean, of course. Oh, I shall be happy in this, I know. Is it too idiotically silly and frivolous, after all, to think it matters so much ? It’s not looked upon as frivolous to enjoy a good picture ? No ! That’s

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artistic interest. Then why isn't it 'artistic' to enjoy actually being the delightful colouring and the graceful 'line,' and all that? It gives such pleasure, and not only to oneself," mused Rosamond. "Now, shall I, or not, wear just a bud fastened into the lace here?"

She had chosen that bud from the bowl of roses set on her corner writing-table; she was pinning it in when a sudden thought checked her.

"Why——"

The smile faded from her face. A little, unreasonable chill seemed to pass over her.

Why, she had forgotten. This brand-new frock was not for wearing at dinner to-night! This was for "special" occasions; parties. She'd only been trying it on to see if it needed to be sent back for any alteration. It wasn't as if *her* sweetheart had just come home. *She'd* nobody—nothing to dress for, to make herself into charming pictures for, to-night. Yet here she was prinking, tittivating and taking thought of her appearance, just as if she were, say, in Eleanor's place!

The lace at her breast stirred over a little sigh. "Rather a pity, Rosamond, that you haven't got—somebody nice of your own to admire you just now," she thought. "This frock simply calls for it! . . . Well, some day, perhaps, before it's quite worn out—! But I had better make haste and get out of it, now——"

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Rather slowly she began to unfasten those snaps,
—"since it does fit all right."

She coaxed that tiny hook out of that silken
noose.

Then, with a jerk, she stepped out of the frock,
and gave a little laugh. Her face cleared into
gaiety again.

Briskly she began putting the new vanity away,
humming as she did so, the end of her old song:

"Last night the dogs did bark.

(I hope dinner won't be long. I'm quite hungry.)

And I went out to see—

(Better stuff this tissue-paper back into the
sleeves.)

*And every lass had a spark,
But there's nobody comes for me!"*

She turned back to the wardrobe.

"The old black ninon rag, I suppose——"

That old black ninon rag flattered her neck and
shoulders as even the rose-pink lisse had not done.

—"And perhaps my one and only remaining
piece of modest jewellery——"

This was a tiny antique paste slide and clasp on a
velvet ribbon. Another girl might wear black, to
show up the contrast with her throat, but Rosa-
mond's neck-band was of velvet insolently white,
inviting comparison with the skin against which it
could scarcely be seen.

She was fastening the clasp as the purr of the

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gong through the house rose into a growl and died down again to a mutter.

"Good There is dinner. I wonder if Mr. Ted Urquhart thinks that the secretary ought to be having it in the housekeeper's room, with a frock right up to her chin, and a neat little white turn-over collar?" meditated the secretary as she came downstairs. "Of course I shall have to show him, now, that I do know 'my place,' and that I realise I'm merely a menial in this house. No part of my duty to dress for the young master of the house, even if I did have to write love letters to him! His house. What a pity I don't wear an apron," she concluded with an inward chuckle as she walked demurely into the oak-panelled dining-room of which the long table below the chandelier was unused except for a large party.

The family dined at a small oval table set in one of the windows.

Old Mr. Urquhart, with Charles II. gold buttons on his dress-waistcoat, faced his daughter, who wore an all-white lace dress that made her look as dark as a creole without a creole's warmth. Eleanor was invariably neat, but always her neatness looked as if it had been achieved without the aid of a mirror. Surely, if she'd glanced at her "effect" in the glass, that little brunette would never have chosen a necklace of silver with sapphires, the special stone of a fair-skinned woman?

Rosamond found herself opposite to Mr. Ted

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Urquhart—whom Eleanor's girls, no doubt, would have considered better-looking than ever in evening dress.

"Amusing to think what a much larger party we were last time I sat down to table with Eleanor's dear Ted," reflected Miss Fayre. "Yes; there's no reason why I shouldn't get what amusement I can out of the whole thing?"

The amusement, she found, could begin at once.

It began with what was evidently a discussion by Eleanor of some features of the party arranged for next Saturday, and what was as obviously a repetition of old Mr. Urquhart's sentiments there-upon.

"Well, Eleanor, I wash my hands of it. It's Ted's turf, actually."

"But we've agreed not to ruin the turf! We'll have the dancing on the smaller lawn behind the walled garden instead! I've told Marrow he can't object to that," decreed Eleanor. "After all, this whole place doesn't belong to the g-g-gardener! He behaves as if it did! So like a man! No sense of p-p-proportion at all. We should do far better to have one of those Horticultural Hostesses here, with two or three girls from the Gardening College at Glynde under her——"

"Oh, heaven! Yet more girls," mourned old Mr. Urquhart, crumbling his bread.

And Rosamond Fayre, now taking up the attitude that she decided would bring her in the most

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harmless amusement, looked deprecatingly timid above her soup.

"Well, my dear, you will have the field to yourself this time. You and Miss Fayre"—the old gentleman was, by the way, a great admirer of Miss Fayre's—"will have the field to yourselves. Let me know at what hour you think it will be—ah—safe to return."

"There is to be a special train back to Charing Cross, Father, to take the girls up. They'll be gone by seven, won't they, Rosamond?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Rosamond Fayre.

All the "apron" that she had regretted being unable to tie on over her black dress sounded in her meek voice. Every note of it was calculated to impress upon her neighbour opposite that she, Miss Fayre, was now not the young lady-in-charge of that Holiday Hostel in France. Oh, no! but the humblest of secretaries. The most unassuming of hired menials at Urquhart's Court—Mr. Ted Urquhart's Court. She hoped he saw that. He hadn't looked at her—of course.

"Are you feeling a little tired?" Eleanor asked.

"Oh, no, thanks," uttered the secretary, mildly.

"Why?"

"You seem so quiet to-night."

"Perhaps Miss Fayre also," pronounced old Mr. Urquhart, "is trembling at the thought of the invading hordes."

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"No, really I'm not," protested Miss Fayre, shyly.

"Anyhow, Father, you needn't tremble! You'll be off before they come," his daughter told him, "and you'll be going with him, Ted, of course."

"Oh, will he be going too?" thought Rosamond. "Yes, I suppose he's sure to. He won't care to be one of a 'horde' surrounding her." Without looking at him, she saw the young engineer glance up as he said quietly—

"Oh, no, Eleanor. You're not going to shut me out of these festivities. I'll stay and see the fun."

"Fun—oh, it wouldn't be any fun for you, Ted." the young mistress of the house said absently. "I'm afraid I shouldn't be able to attend to you at all. You see, it's a regular gathering of the Clans, Not only the two hundred Club girls, but several of the workers that I don't seem to get a chance of talking to at any other time. I really shan't have a minute; that shall I, Rosamond?"

"I am afraid you won't," agreed her secretary politely, the while she thought, "That will choke him off, surely. Knowing that Eleanor won't have time for him. He won't want her Two Hundred. He'll go."

"I think I'll stay, all the same," said the quiet, easy voice of the young man who hadn't looked at Rosamond, "unless Uncle Henry wants somebody with him?"

"Ah," thought Rosamond, "will Mr. Urquhart

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think he wants him?" She must have been rather counting, she found, on the added amusement of watching Eleanor's dear Ted ousted for an afternoon by Eleanor's beloved girls. For it was with quite a little thrill of gladness that she heard old Mr. Urquhart tell the young man to do just what he liked.

"Then that's all right. I shall stop and lend a hand, Eleanor. Never thought of doing anything else."

"He must like her very much after all—I mean, he must like her," was Rosamond's thought, followed by "Why, of course he likes her! He'll put up with the whole of the hen-party for her."

"And if I'm talking to these people all the time, Ted," she heard the engaged girl say later on during dinner, "you'll have to get Miss Fayre to show you what to do——"

"If—she'll be so kind," said young Urquhart.

Miss Fayre gave him a polite half-glance. It was not one of the secretary's duties to smile at him, after all. Sitting there eating his dinner as stodgily as if—well, as if he weren't capable of saving a girl's life, for instance. But perhaps he was so fond of the society of girls that he preferred them in hundreds?

"There was one young man of the Classics who insisted on looking on at the Bacchanalian Orgies," old Mr. Urquhart was intoning presently.

THE OTHER GIRL

"Remember his fate, Ted. He was torn to pieces, was he not?"

"I'm not looking on, though," announced the young man, "I'm helping you." And he raised his close-cropped brown head and looked across the centrepiece, a white china basket full of peaches held up by three white china Cupids—looked for the first time directly at Rosamond Fayre.

And this time it was she who did not look.

"Very well; you go to Mr. Ted Urquhart, then, Rosamond," said Eleanor, in her "settling" voice, "when anything's wanted."

Rosamond, intent upon the little silver-handled knife in her hand, said, deferentially, "Yes. Thank you. Only—I don't think Mr. Ted Urquhart quite realises what he has let himself in for!"

CHAPTER XI

THE HEN-PARTY

IT was the afternoon of the great Hen-party at Urquhart's Court.

Imagine a giantess's piece-box of scraps of every-coloured silk, muslin, and stuff,—blue, yellow orange, and a pervading, blasting shade of pink—tumbled out haphazard over a giant's green billiard-table, and stirred by a freakish breeze into never-ceasing movement. This was the first impression of Eleanor's invading army of guests upon the eye.

Upon the ear smote the indistinguishable, unending din of their voices. It filled all the air above the grave old basking house, and the stately lawns. Not actually loud, but high-pitched, shrill. . . .

That clatter of feminine voices without a steady bass among them! That acre-wide flutter of feminine garments with never a jacket-suit to give them value! That pinky-white speckle of feminine faces——

There appeared to be nothing but women, women, women at The Court to-day. For Eleanor, with

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so many women-volunteers, never engaged waiters for these occasions.

Even Mr. Beeton, the butler, was lying low in his pantry, sulking indignantly to think that a gentleman's country-house—a house where Mr. Beeton was in service! had been turned topsy-turvy into something more like Hampstead Heath on a Whit-Monday than anything he'd ever come across in the whole course of his experience—not that he knew anything about that neighbourhood except by hearsay. (He was an old sailor.) Mr. Marrow, the gardener, broken-hearted to think what those regular hooligans of young women might be up to on his lawns and in his gardens, had also taken the afternoon off—while those lawns and gardens hummed and buzzed and twittered with the invaders.

Rosamond Fayre, wide-hatted and cool in her white gown, paused for one moment on the Terrace where rows of tables and benches were set out, before she turned into the house on her next errand.

And out of the ivy-draped entrance of the house there came out to meet her the one and only man left about the place that day.

Ted Urquhart, nut-brown against his flannels, carried a large glass pitcher in either hand. All the afternoon he'd been carrying something: pyramids of cut cake, dishes of cucumber-sandwiches, relays of jugs of hot-water; and all the afternoon he had worn the ultra-sweet and

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restrained look of one who longs to hurl at the nearest head that which he carries.

This time it was iced lemonade.

"Where do I take this to, Miss Fayre?" he asked, quietly.

"To Nurse Agatha's Invalid Girls' table. The furthest, under the lime-trees," Rosamond instructed him, a little shortly, pointing.

And as she turned into the house she thought, "This time I shall give him the slip. Really, Eleanor's dear Ted is too absurd this afternoon! Just because Eleanor told him he was to take his orders from me he elects to take them this way! Puts on that deadly-docile manner which always means that a man is smouldering with rage, and makes himself into Eleanor's secretary's shadow!"

For that many-coloured pool of girls on the lawn might swirl and surge and re-form, but all the afternoon it had been navigated by two figures in white never far apart; the tall fair girl so closely followed by the taller sunburnt man.

"Just because Eleanor can't attend to him. Silly of him to show he minds! Fancy his minding so much. . . . Eleanor must have managed to make him very fond of her somehow. That's a mercy! Curious that you never can tell what will attract any given kind of man," reflected Rosamond Fayre, as she looked into old Mr. Urquhart's usually hushed study, now delivered over to the Ladies' Orchestra, white-clad, with blue velvet Zouave jackets, who

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were giggling joyously over an unduly prolonged feast of Mr. Marrow's peaches and lemonade. "So sorry to uproot you, but when you've finished, would you mind playing for some more dancing on the smaller lawn?" suggested Rosamond Fayre, sympathetically.

As she came out into the corridor again she was again confronted by that suppressed, that meek figure in nut-brown and white.

In a voice as mild as Rosamond's own voice when she was very much "*the Secretary*," Ted Urquhart said, "All the parties have had tea now, Miss Fayre. And lemonade. And ice-cream. Can't I bring you some——"

"Oh, I had some tea with the United Laundry Girls, thank you," said Rosamond Fayre.

"Then what," persisted Ted Urquhart smoothly, "can I do for you now?"

"Well! Perhaps you might take Miss Newnham and her friends—those ladies who brought down the Kennington Road Group—and show them the grounds, and the fish-pond——"

"Is that ehe Stinor-Wrangler Lady and her party?" asked young Urquhart. For one second his face expressed a wish to show that party *into* the fish-pond and leave them there. But he only said, "I'd rather do something for the girls themselves if I might?"

"Play games with them, then?" suggested Rosamond, not without mischief, as she walked

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away from him into the Hall. For here they were met by a nearer sound against that background of incessant treble clamour—the sound that drifted in of a singing game, played on the cleared portion of the Terrace by one of the “nursery-parties.”

These girls still wore their befrizzed hair bobbing against their backs and their skirts swinging up to their knees as their light heels kicked up Mr. Marrow's gravel and they sang in chorus:—

“ We're waitin' for a part-ner !

Waitin' for a part-ner !

Open the ring ! And choose your Queen

(A sound of scuffling here)

And kiss her when you've got her in.”

Then, more loudly as Rosamond Fayre and the one man left at Urquhart's Court appeared framed in the doorway under the old red-brick shield, the little Cockneys sang:—

“ On the carpet you shall meet

As the grass grows in the wheat ;

Stand up now upon your feet,

And kiss the one you love so sweet !

We're waitin'——”

“Are you coming to play this game?” the young man in the doorway rather brusquely asked Rosamond Fayre.

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"I? No time!" she said, blushing a little for no reason except that she found herself for no reason blushing a little.

She left Mr. Ted Urquhart to watch that game or play it as he choose, and descended the Terrace steps to the lawn again.

The dabs of moving colour seen from above became moving figures, most of whom Rosamond knew by sight She walked beset by greetings from Eleanor's girls, smiling to herself as the pervading buzz disentangled itself into tags of sentences.

"Hoo! Talk about lar—arf! If you'd 'a seen me and her gittin' it done, ready to come, at four this mornin'——"

"Why, in the train comin' along——"

"I says to 'im, well, if I don't go to-day, I says, there may never be a next time, I says, very well, 'e says; Gow! and I——"

"Miss, dear! Trailin' a twig on your skirt! Yer sweetheart's thinkin' of you!"

"'Ilder!"

"'Ere, young Dais! *Your've* got a cheek, to——"

"Beller! Beller!"

Then, in a very different sort of dialect——

"Has anyone seen Miss Newnham? Ah, Hypatia; there you are. . . . Impossible, in this *melée*. . . . But of *course* I shall come to the Meeting afterwards, if only I can hale these young

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barbarians back to their native wilds of Kentish Town in time——”

“ *Whey-ah* is Eleanor Urquhart? Yes, I know! She sent some sort of a myrmidon of hers, a typist-individual, I think, to——”

Rosamond primmed her mouth. She did not greatly care for those specially-looked-up-to friends of Eleanor’s who had degrees after their names and who wore hand-wrought silver Suffrage-brooches and who made little “cultured” jokes about the girls. . . .

The enjoying girls themselves were all right. So were their other guardians. Those Hospital Nurses, for instance, cheery and crisp and trim in the mauve-and-white uniform that one of them had not taken off, as she smilingly admitted, for the last thirty-six hours—coming straight on, off duty——

“Wouldn’t you like a little more to eat, Nurse——”

“My dear, I’d like a little less, if possible!”

They were dears, Rosamond thought. So were the Sisters of Mercy, who, for all their black robes and veils and twisted girdles, were the gayest of the gay; their white-linen-bound faces bright as their own silver crosses, free from all care that was not for others.

“Sister! Have you had anything yourself? You haven’t, I know,” said Rosamond Fayre. ‘I’ll send——’ She turned—to meet the usual resigned and following figure. “Oh, Mr. Urquhart!

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Would you mind going up to the house and making them bring some fresh tea here—a little tray——”

It was young Urquhart himself who brought that little tray. He carried it, without the loss of a drop, over the crowded lawn, to the garden-seat under the trees, to that Sister-in-Charge.

But this did not check him for long from this obviously deliberate and idiotic plan of dogging the footsteps of Miss Urquhart's second-in-command.

Surely, surely he could see for himself what to do? He could choose which girls to show round the place (his own place) on his own initiative, couldn't he?

Apparently not!

Rosamond, shepherding a Guild of Girl Needleworkers past the walled gardens to the other lawn where the tuning-up of three fiddles and a 'cello grew louder as they approached, found that Mr. Ted Urquhart was practically upon her heels once more.

Once more, she supposed, he'd bring out that monotonous, restrained, but temper-struck "What can I do for you now?"

No!

For at the further side of the lawn from the white and blue wooden stand where the blue-and-white-clad Ladies' Orchestra were tuning up, she perceived at last Mr. Ted Urquhart's *fiancée*.

Eleanor, wearing her most "responsible"-looking costume of stone-grey, and too absorbed to notice her *fiancé's* approach, was pacing that

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further path beside an enlightened-looking young woman in pince-nez and brown patterned Liberty delaine, who conversed in earnest gasps, something about——

“Such a futile Committee, though! Narrow-minded Bishops! Silly old retired militarist Colonels! . . . What can you expect, my dear Miss Urquhart, from imbecile survivals of that type? . . . How can they hope to realise that We of To-day are not, not as women were forced to be in our grandmother's time? . . . As I say, the New Spirit has percolated even to the strata of these poor Guild-girls here! . . . Even *they* read Wells and Galsworthy! even they are growing to probe into things for themselves! To learn to live with their Brains instead of merely——”

Here, as if in soft denial of all she had been saying, the band broke into the alluring drawl of an old-fashioned waltz-tune, played rather slowly.

Three bars of the unspoilable Eton Boating Song filled the lawn with girls in smoothly revolving couples. They waltzed; their young bodies turning as one, their cheaply-shod feet scarcely leaving the turf, their faces set, grave and happy and hypnotised by the rhythm of music and movement. . . .

It was all strikingly unlike that Saturnalian gambol that old Mr. Urquhart had prophesied!

These girlish toilers, set free for one summer afternoon from sweltering labour in pickle-factory and hand-laundry and underground eating-house

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—dressed in cheap finery—of “pink and Saxe and sky and helio”—for which they would pay by a shilling at a time, danced on the grass with a stateliness lost to the ball-rooms of their rulers. They danced, slum-bred and born into drudgery as they were; and they made of Byron’s waltz a measure as decorous as the Pavane itself.

“Row—Row to-gether,” hummed Urquhart, as the insistent melody that will surely live when the last echo of tango and rag-time has died away, throbbed in his blood and set his foot tapping in time upon the turf. Rosamond, without turning her head, realised that this young man was yearning, as she yearned, to dance. He raised his voice a little.

“I say, Eleanor! D’you care to——”

Eleanor, as Rosamond to her amusement noticed, did not hear the voice of the young man at her elbow.

He spoke again.

“I say, Eleanor. It’s rather jolly. Come and have a turn, won’t you?”

Eleanor Urquhart looked round absently at last.

“Er—Oh, you want to dance, Ted? Do you very much mind if I don’t?” said the engaged girl. “I have so much to ask my friend, Miss Fabian. I shan’t get her to myself again, I know . . . Dance with somebody else. Miss Fayre will dance with you, I’m sure, if you ask her. Rosamond dear,” she turned to her secretary with that little

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"settling" voice of hers. "You'll dance with Mr. Urquhart, won't you?"

Rosamond Fayre became conscious of an unexpected thrill of sudden and warm and young and undeniable delight. . . .

She adored dancing.

The Eton Boating Song remained her favourite waltz.

An eye used to summing up partners at a glance told her that this lithe-limbed engineer-man of Eleanor's would dance as well as he fetched-and-carried or helped to pitch refreshment tents. Yes! By the way he moved you could see that he belonged to those ideal and flawless partners of whom every woman can recall perhaps six during the whole of her dancing-days; forgetting names and faces but remembering always "*that gorgeous waltz I had with that man at the So-and-so dance.*"

He took a quick, eager step forward; put out a long arm, muttered a hasty "Oh, may I——"

And at that moment Rosamond Fayre herself could not have explained why she said—what she did say.

Which was: "Oh! Do you mind if I don't dance either? Waltzing always makes me so—so giddy. I'll find you a good partner instead, though, Mr. Urquhart."

She turned to a couple who had just fallen aside out of the throng. A girl in a long black velvet

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coat was panting under a black fur stole and gasping huskily, "'Ere! 'Arf-time, Pan!" to the other girl, who wore the most ambitious gown to be seen at Urquhart's Court that day. Satin of the colour of fruit-juice poured over a silver spoon set off her opulent figure, and she turned a laughing, boldly-handsome face under a halo of frilled and crimson tulle as Miss Fayre called "Pansy!"

Another moment and Ted Urquhart found himself twirled into that turning, turning throng, his arm about the crimson-satin-swathed waist of his old acquaintance the Principal Boy.

"Well! Fancy meeting Mister You! Brings back the dear old days, don't it?" beamed the resplendent and perfumed Pansy as they swung into step. "Quite a treat for me not having to dance gentleman for once! I s'pose you're such a rarity this afternoon, you've got to be handed round—like the other ices, eh? Thought I wasn't mistaken on the front just now. I said to young Annie, 'See who that is playing comic butler with the little tray?' (Oh, *come* on, High-Jinksy, you *can* Bos'!) 'He's too proud to look our way,' I said. 'Still, if it isn't him all right! It's Miss Fayre's boy,' I said——"

"Please! Please don't say it," her partner cut her short, in a tone that made her stare quickly up into his set, sunburnt face. "Er—There's been a mistake here, Miss Pansy. You don't know my name, I think——"

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"'Think' is good!" laughed the Principal Boy, her brown eyes gleaming, evidently with a memory of that sparring-match *à propos* of names over the Hostel tea-table in France.

But her partner finished curtly. "My name is Urquhart."

"Urquhart— Why! Fancy! I never knew our Miss Urquhart had got a brother?"

"She hasn't. I'm not. I am——"

It seemed to stick in his throat. He could not say it. He said, "I am her cousin."

"Brother to the other cousin?" enquired Pansy interestedly. "Brother to the one Miss Urquhart's goin' to marry?"

So he had to say it after all.

"I am engaged to be married to Miss Urquhart."

"What?" cried the Principal Boy very sharply. "Go on?"

She fell out of step, bumped against the next couple, recovered herself with a short "Go where you're lookin'!" She did not speak again until they had waltzed twice round the lawn, from which Miss Fayre had vanished now.

Then, still waltzing, Pansy asked steadily, "Straight? It's true?"

"Yes."

"Then, if it's not a rude question, what's the meaning of——"

"There is no 'meaning,'" said Ted Urquhart distinctly, as the sky-blue-jacketed First Violin,

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erect in the middle of her platform, tapped her bow against her music-stand as a signal. The tune was allowed to languish to its close. "Thank you, so much," said Urquhart. "It has been—er—delightful seeing you again like this. May I bring you some lemonade?"

"All right, if there's nothing to drink," murmured the Pantomime Boy, absently. Her face was a bewildered blank as her partner strode off down the path towards the refreshment tent.

And to herself she muttered, "Now, *wot's* all this?"

She could not be expected to guess that "all this" meant a very special form of Purgatory for the only man present at this afternoon's hen-party.

Tossed about like a shuttle-cock between the girl he was pledged to marry and the other girl who—who grudged him one glance, dash it, one turn of a waltz! "Miss Fayre's boy," forsooth—a sort of District Messenger Boy, that was how she treated him! Sent him off airily here, there, and everywhere—

Anywhere, except where he'd meant to stay; namely, *near her!*

Well, at all events this infernal party would soon be over, Urquhart reflected as he finished handing round the last of the lemonade. Nearly half-past five. He was surely at an end of his trials for to-day at least?

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No !

Two more trials were in store for him.

The first of these announced itself in an alien Voice which smote upon Urquhart's ear from behind one of the clipped box hedges. A Voice that emitted squib-like cries of " Now, isn't this just Old Eng—land ? Say, Amanda ! Isn't this just the most typical yet ? " And then there came into sight Miss Fayre escorting two ladies in long coats and small veiled hats, carrying binoculars and guide-books. Hurriedly Rosamond explained that these ladies wished to be taken over Urquhart's Court. They had heard that it was " an exhibition-place "—which by the way it wasn't. But Ted Urquhart found himself adding to the many odd jobs of the afternoon that of taking these American tourists over his domain ; and of listening to their unsolicited testimonials upon those charming ; old-world ; delightful ; fas'natingly delicious ; harmonious-looking house and gardens !

For after each adjective the Voice seemed to pause for a semi-colon of appreciation. It dwelt upon that beautiful ; priceless ; exquisite Romney portrait of " Mrs. Edward Urquhart," and at the priest's hole it vociferated, " Say, Amanda ! doesn't the mere sight of this carry us way, way, *way* back into the days of Cramwell ? "

Young Urquhart wished it could. . . .

Why did this type of American insist upon leaving nothing, *nothing* unsaid ?

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In the hall at the end of the tour, Miss Fayre, who was fetching a mislaid wrap for one of the University Settlement workers, came in for a share of the thanks poured upon the wretched and fidgeting host. The Lady with the Voice grasped both the secretary-girl's hands and held them as she announced that she just couldn't go until she'd told this beautiful; charming; graceful; tender; womanly; delightful-looking young English lady the impression she'd made upon two strangers that day.

"Soon as we saw you," effused the Voice, "in that simple; fas'nating white gown on the green lawn! with the glorious; genuine; Anglo-Saxon fair hair! And that lovely; reel; milk-and-peach blow; English complexion! Like a young Queen, I guess! Among all your humble guests! I said, 'Why! If *she*! Isn't the very unmistakable; absolute Image and Ideal of what the beautiful young mistress of an old English country-house ought! To *be*!' I tell you, my dear young lady——"

"Oh! Please don't!" gasped Miss Urquhart's paid secretary, standing beside Miss Urquhart's *fiancé*, as if they were both hypnotised by these relentless compliments.

That Voice went on to thank her, Rosamond Fayre, for providing strangers with a memory that they guessed they would never; never forget! The memory of a perfect; wonderful; Picture that they reckoned couldn't be beaten by all those miles

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and miles of galleries they'd done in Europe ! It was a pity that Mr. Sargent didn't take and paint it right there !—"the old hall with the oak-beams and the carving, and you, my dear, in the doorway of your adorable ; English home ! standing beside this fine ; tall ; manly ; real English-looking ; devoted young husband of yours——"

Here Mr. Ted Urquhart literally turned tail and fled. Rosamond Fayre, crimson to the roots of her admired hair, saw his white-clad figure speed helter-skelter down the Terrace steps, thread the maze of colour on the lawn, and plunge into the green depths of the lime-tree Avenue. Every movement, she fancied, conveyed the young man's last word :

"I won't stand any more. All these cackling women ! This finishes it ! Here's where I knock off !"

It was, indeed, a fairly accurate version of young Urquhart's feelings as he paused on the Avenue at last, lighted up a pipe, and told himself that he'd give a fiver to have a man to talk to.

Even as he tossed the match into the hedge he saw the figure of a man in grey, appearing round the bend of the drive, who walked briskly towards him.

"Good afternoon !" began this stranger, who seemed very young, with a fresh-coloured pleasant face, blonde as a biscuit. "This is Urquhart's Court, isn't it ?"

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"Yes," said Ted, welcomingly. "Come up to the house, will you? I'm afraid you may have to wait a bit if you've come to see my Uncle. My name's Urquhart."

"My name's Bray; Cecil Bray," the younger man introduced himself.

Then he introduced the second of those two last trials that had been in store for Mr. Ted Urquhart that afternoon.

For this pleasant-voiced, very decent-seeming sort of young fellow called Bray added, "I'm afraid your uncle doesn't know me; I've come, as a matter of fact, to see Miss Fayre."

CHAPTER XII

THE SOUND OF A KISS

ROSAMOND FAYRE told herself that it was just like Cecil Bray to carry out his written intention to come and look her up at Urquhart's Court, on the very afternoon of that hen-party.

Poor dear boy! He simply couldn't have chosen a worse time for his visit!

To begin with, he must needs make his appearance in the middle of that vortex of getting the assorted flocks of girls off in the brakes that were to carry them, laughing, chattering and calling like homing rooks, to the station and the London-bound special train.

Then it was such an age before Rosamond could find and disentangle Eleanor and introduce this old friend of her brother's to her employer.

And then Eleanor, instead of doing it herself, must turn to her dear Ted (who'd come up with the other man) to ask him to ask Mr. Bray to stay to dinner.

Dinner, too, seemed a disorganised, spiritless, after-the-party sort of meal!

Nobody dressed. Everybody was tired, dull

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with reaction. The whole air still seemed a-twitter with the treble clamour of the lately-departed hen-party. Nobody appeared to wish to talk; with the exception of old Mr. Urquhart, who had returned from his motor-expedition in what was for him quite a sociable mood.

He discovered that he had been up at Magdalen with this young Mr. Bray's father—no, grandfather; indeed, he had corresponded with him for several years afterwards, on the subject of some manuscripts that had been found appertaining to some marriage settlements of a Dame Urquhart who had married a de Braye or Braie in the reign of

Presently he was saying that there would scarcely be time to go into all those very interesting old letters in just one evening. The best plan would be for his young friend, Mr. Bray, to stay the night—to stay the week-end, if he would, at the Court—would it not?

"Awfully kind of you, Sir," murmured the young man fervently. His china-blue eyes lighted up. Evidently he asked for nothing better than to stay the week-end. He glanced round the oval table expecting the conventional "Yes, do," and "That would be very nice," from the rest of the party.

The rest of the party remained almost forbiddingly mute.

Poor Cecil Bray, a sensitive youth, felt thereby obliged to decline the invitation with a rueful

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"But I'm awfully sorry, I'm afraid I really have to get back to-night," without knowing why no one but the old gentleman had made any attempt to keep him.

The reason was——

As far as Eleanor was concerned, she hardly heard what was going on at the table. Her striving, earnest little mind was still with the party of the afternoon. Had it been a success? Had no one been offended or overlooked? Would it have been better to have had Votes of Thanks proposed to those University Group Ladies? Besides these problems, there was another more disquieting memory of the afternoon. Something Miss Fabian had just been beginning to tell Eleanor about a friend of hers, a lady rent-collector in Brixton. This friend seemed to know "something" about one of Miss Urquhart's protégées, something "not very creditable" about the theatrical girl, Pansy Vansittart. About Pansy? A Club girl who had enjoyed the special privilege of being one of those who were taken into Eleanor's Normandy Hostel? What could this be? Someone had called Miss Fabian away before she said more. But she had promised to make enquiries of that friend, to write to Miss Urquhart later. What could it be? pondered Eleanor uneasily. No wonder her attention had wandered leagues away from this young man who'd come to call on Rosamond!

As for Rosamond—Well! She couldn't press Cecil Bray to stay at Urquhart's Court.

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It wasn't her house.

It was the house of Eleanor'. *ncé.*

Rosamond was only one of the staff!

Besides, even had it been otherwise, he didn't want Cecil there. She knew what would happen if he stayed for a week-end where she was. He'd promised not to "bother" her again. But she knew what became of that sort of promise made by that sort of young man. Of course he'd propose again. She saw every symptom of it threatening in every line of his fair, fifth-form-room face. She could prophesy, verbatim, the old familiar, futile, ever-recurring dialogue between man and maid that must presently ensue.

He (gabbling with earnestness): "I would do anything, Miss Fayre, *anything* to make you happy. Can't you try and——"

She: "I am most frightfully sorry, but it's no good. No man can 'make' a woman happy. Either she is happy with him or she isn't. And I know I couldn't be with you. Not in that way, Cecil."

He (clearing his throat for a fresh start): "You don't care for me yet, I know. But look here, give me a chance, just a chance! If you saw more of me you'd grow to care——"

She (miserably): "No, no. People may 'grow' to like other people. But nobody ever, ever yet 'grew' to love anybody. . . . Please, please don't

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go on like this. . . . I'm so sorry. I like you so. Very well then, I won't say I feel like your sister. . . . But there are other girls——"

He (gruffly) : " Not for me ! "

She (strenuously persuasive) : " If you only knew, one girl is much the same as another. Some are prettier. But otherwise they don't vary. Honestly ! It's you men who vary so——"

And so on. Again Rosamond repeated to herself ruefully and gently what she was fated to be saying presently aloud : " Oh, Cecil ! I am so sorry ! "

Even if she were the mistress of the Court she would not ask Cecil Bray to stay.

As for the master of that Court, well ! He was very well aware that this guest opposite couldn't take his eyes from the girl he'd come to see. He, Ted Urquhart, could give a very good guess at what had brought the young beggar down. And he wasn't going to have him staying under his roof for one moment longer than he could help. The sooner he packed off, out of the place, the better.

There was a jolly good train up to town at eight-forty. . . .

But it struck eight as they finished dinner ; and confound him, the young beggar made no sign of packing off. He would have to be put up with, then, until the last train that night.

Not longer !

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In the drawing-room, Eleanor looked up over the coffee-cups, murmured to her father that she must see him about something, drew him away into the little morning-room, and shut the door.

Ted Urquhart, left with the other two, knew what Eleanor meant. She meant to rescue this Mr. Bray from old Mr. Urquhart's conversational clutches. After all, it was Rosamond he'd come down to see. He must be allowed a little talk with her.

For a second Urquhart found himself hesitating.

Must he go?

Well, he could hardly stay!

He was the host.

Common politeness . . . Yes! He'd have to go.

He'd have to leave the coast clear for this young cub with that unfair advantage of being an old acquaintance. He'd go.

A nice situation for any man. Forced, in his own house, to take himself off while another man proposed, as likely as not, to——

The girl who wasn't supposed to be anything at all to the master of the house.

That was the maddening part of it.

Raging silently, Urquhart went.

And he met the only girl whose doings Ted Urquhart had any right to resent or arrange, in the hall.

Eleanor's small face—sallow with tiredness—

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was turned up to his in the ivy-softened frame of the doorway, just where that other girl—the secretary-girl in whom he hadn't any right—had stood this afternoon, blushing like a rose to hear that ironic mistake blared abroad by that American lady with the voice.

"Oh, Ted——"

"Hullo, Eleanor, I haven't had a word with you all day," said her *fiancé*, outwardly pleasantly civil, inwardly savage because he had no valid right to feel savage at all.

"Oh, Ted, I was just going to ask you if you'd mind if I didn't come out for my little walk with you to-night. There's something I do so want to finish," said the engaged girl. "I am never really happy unless I can check all the caterers' accounts the very day they——"

"Oh, all right," agreed her betrothed, quickly. "Not if you've anything more important to do."

More important! Accounts, visitors, anything at Urquhart's Court was reckoned of more importance than Ted Urquhart himself to-night, thought the young man bitterly as he strode out.

Precious little consideration he got from either of these girls!

A rum idea of the position of an engaged girl his cousin seemed to have! Pretty unsatisfactory for him, if he'd happened to be madly in love with her. And even if he wasn't in love with her, he was engaged to her. Yes. A curious notion she had

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of playing the game. She treated her lawful *fiancé* a good deal more off-handedly than that other young fellow was treated. Young Bray, now was to have a solid couple of hours *tête-à-tête* and the whole drawing-room to himself with the girl—the other girl. . . .

Or they'd go out for a stroll together, thought Urquhart angrily, as his long legs carried him over the wide and empty lawn in the golden, slowly-gathering dusk. He clenched his brown hands in his jacket-pockets as he pictured that other fellow picking up a wrap out of the hall, putting it, reverently as he might have put his own arm, about the supple shoulders of——

"My girl," exclaimed Ted Urquhart aloud and violently to the lime-trees. "My girl——"

The sound of his own voice and the preposterous thing it said checked him.

More slowly he struck into the Avenue. He walked along between those late-blossoming lime-trees with their scent of thyme-and-white-currants-mixed. And as he walked, he thought, seriously and deliberately, over the whole complicated situation that had just condensed itself into two words.

Two simple words that may be said to sum up the problem of life so often, and to so many a worried-to-death young man!

His girl. . . .

It was now perfectly clear to Ted Urquhart that he could never think of Eleanor's secretary as

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anything else. No getting out of it. Every atom of him had recognised her, from the first moment that he'd come upon her, swinging along by the waters' edge in France with the happy sea-wind making free with that hair of hers.

His !

Yes ; he'd recognised his love, his mate. He'd tell her——

But stop. He'd no right to tell her anything of the sort while he was still pledged to marry somebody else.

He lighted his pipe ; then strode on smoking, thinking doggedly over a problem that seems each time too ghastly to be hackneyed.

This couldn't go on. Not this Hades of a life in the same house with the wrong girl to whom he was bound, while the right girl was dangled incessantly before his tantalised eyes. He couldn't stand another day of it. No !

Well, there were two ways of putting a stop to it.

One—Marry Eleanor and clear out.

Two—Break off his engagement with the wrong girl.

That was the dickens !

That was about the most unpleasant job a man is ever called upon to face. Lord, how it would make him wish himself back in the Andes ; under 'em !

Messing up a girl's life——

Still, wasn't it far, far more of a mess if, instead of breaking with, a man married the wrong girl ?

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Commonsense said yes. Commonsense said it was making the mistake of a lifetime, and with one's eyes open. Involving two people . . . perhaps three . . . sometimes four! Ruining all chance of future happiness, just to save a present wrench. Just because one felt a cur not to go on.

Breaking it off was the only possible solution. Yes! Even after a year. Even at the eleventh hour. That must be done. It remained "the dickens," all the same. . . .

Here the brooding Ted came to the wrought-iron lodge-gates. He pushed them aside.

The very Deuce and All!

He went on down the lane between tall hedges, where coloured flowers were darkening to black blots while white blossoms were gleaming whiter in the gradual dusk.

Eleanor. She was the difficulty. Of his own making!

Yes, he'd got himself into it. Ass! Ass that he'd been!

Now he'd got to get himself out—and to feel, as well as feeling an ass, a cad about it all. . . .

Here a gap in the hedge showed a cornfield where men, evidently mistrusting the holding-up of the dry weather, were still working, late as it was, carting the early-ripened sheaves.

Ted Urquhart leant over the gate, watching mechanically the big, galleon-like shape of the waggon against the open, lilac sky, the steady

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movements of the men in the fading light. At another time he would have offed with his coat, vaulted that gate into the field, and offered to lend a hand. This evening he'd something else to do.

He'd got to consider, definitely, how he was going to put it to Eleanor.

To tell her he'd thought better of marrying her—after this whole year of having it peacefully and satisfactorily settled that he was going to do so.

What on earth would she say? She'd have every right to say she thought he'd behaved—most extraordinarily. (He had.) Would she ask, "Is it that you are disappointed in me?"

What could a chap say to that?

He wasn't "disappointed." That didn't even enter into it at all.

Supposing she said, "Have you met somebody else, then?"

Whew!

The shaded lane behind him was growing darker, darker. But over the cornfield in front of him the moon was slowly rising, the bright, coppery, shield of a full moon that had looked a mere silver trifle to ornament a girl's gold hair on the evening of the first day that he'd met—

Never mind that yet. Eleanor.

Supposing she said, "If there's somebody else, why didn't you write and tell me? You have been here for days. Why didn't you tell me directly you came?"

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Well, why hadn't he? He wished to Heaven he had, instead of procrastinating to make sure of—what he'd been as certain of as if it had been going on from the beginning of all things.

Supposing Eleanor went on, "Who is it?"

Or, "Do I know her?"

Would he have to set forth the whole embarrassing story to the poor little soul? Inflict upon her something that would offend and wound the heart of any girl alive, whether or not she had ever cared passionately for the wretched man who was practically explaining to her that she (whom he'd found excellent reasons for asking to become his wife) was now considered inadequate, shoved out of existence in his mind by one glance from—No! Not even from, but at the girl she employed!

And then, what about that arrangement about the Court?

Damn that old house, thought the young owner of it. He was in a mood to contemplate rushing up to his lawyers' on Monday morning about drawing up a deed-of-gift to his Uncle. Couldn't he hand it over bodily like that? Or refuse to take anything but a quit-rent of say a basket of Kentish cherries or a pink rose at Midsummer . . . anything!

He knew he'd never live in the place himself. These last few infernal days had about fed him up with a peaceful—as they called it—English country-life. Let Eleanor and the old man stay on. And

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even if they insisted that now they'd have to turn out, it needn't come to that. That part of it could be allowed to drift until something happened. Or, as is more frequent in such a programme, until nothing happened. He, Ted, would clear. He'd sink some other property and buy a steam-yacht. Then he'd be off with his wife to—

H'm. Here he was thinking of her as his wife now, this girl whose hand he had never touched, and to whom he hadn't, when he came to examine it, actually said a word of anything but the merest commonplaces.

What did words matter—in a miracle?

He'd take the shortest cut. She'd got to have him.

Surely she had the sense to see that she was made for him?

She might have the sense; but, Urquhart thought with a memory of that demure stare of hers, that meek, pretty, mocking voice, she might not choose to admit it all at once.

He'd make her.

However, all that was for afterwards. . . .

With a jerk he took his arms from the gate, turned his back on the cornfield in the moonlight, and began to make his way back towards the lodge—and Eleanor.

For now his mind was made up. To break off his idiotic "engagement" first. Then try his luck with . . . his own girl.

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He'd tell Eleanor, he decided, to-night. He'd go in and get that perfectly rotten interview over as soon as possible.

He'd trust to luck and the first words—remorseful but unmistakable—that came into his head when he stood before her.

It was quite dark under the lime-trees now. Later than he'd thought. Still, Eleanor would be in the little office where she sometimes sat balancing books after she'd come in from the every-evening stroll which she was now accustomed to take with her *fiancé*. . . .

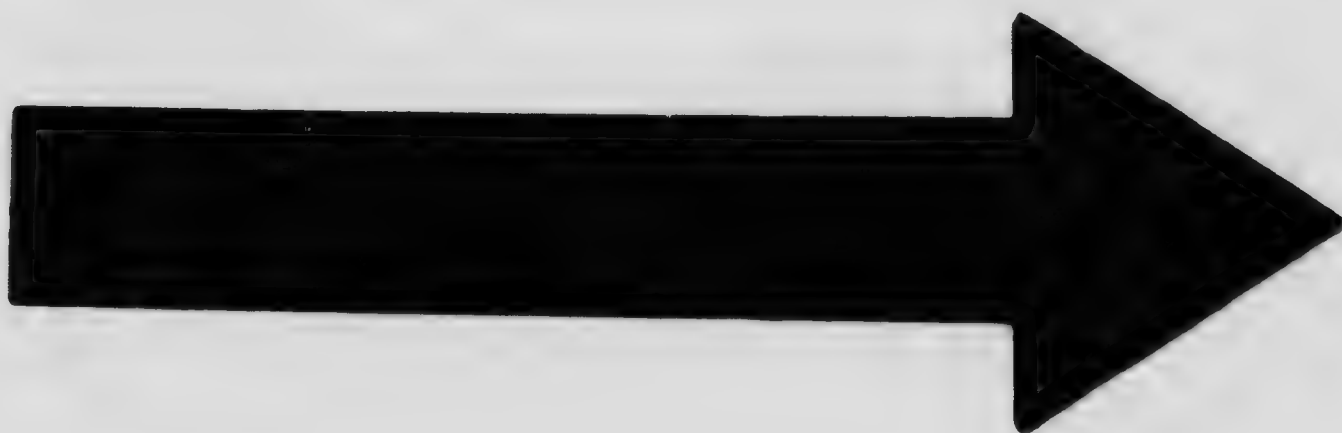
Yesterday had meant the last of those flavourless walks, then. There was a flicker of comfort in the thought. Still there was the Old Harry to pay for it !

Through the darkness Urquhart heard the stable-clock slowly striking ten.

That Bray boy—he was only a youngster, after all !—would probably have gone, thought Urquhart, hurrying doggedly along to his perfectly rotten interview ; to the Old Harry. Yes : that lad would be off by this time. . . .

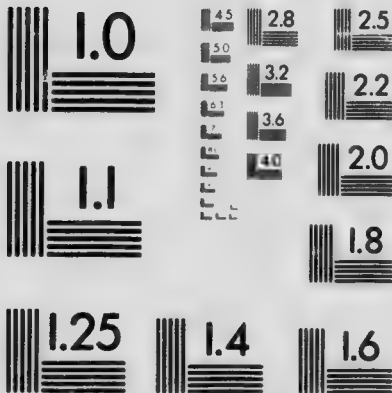
The sounds of steps and voices, approaching on the lawn on the other side of the lime-trees, told Urquhart that he was wrong. The Bray boy was only going now. He was making his way down to the drive by the short cut across the lawn. And " She " was seeing him off.

That meant nothing, of course. But——



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There followed something that suddenly held up Ted Urquhart in his stride just as if a barbed barricade had crashed down across his path.

In that blankly horrible moment of revelation he could not move.

For without premeditation or warning he caught the sound of Miss Fayre's voice, which was speaking to young Bray in a tone that Urquhart, who thought he knew by heart every one of its pretty mocking cadences, had never heard. No. He had not been privileged to hear that note in the voice that seemed to utter a whole volume of gentle wistful tenderness in just two words. Yes ; for the second time that evening a couple of words gave the whole of a situation. This time they were these :—

“ Oh, Cecil ! ”

That alone was enough to smash a dream !

And then worse followed. Another, an unmistakable sound that struck a sledge-hammer blow full on the heart of the young man who heard it. Yet, such a soft little whisper of a sound ; not louder than the chirp of a sleepy thrush on the bough above him. . . . This sound, though, was not to be confused with the noise that might be made by any bird, or by any rustling of the lime-branches that separated young Urquhart from those two standing there in the darkness. There are not two sounds like it.

It was the sound of a kiss.

CHAPTER XIII

A WHITE NIGHT

"**G**OT a sweetheart already, has she," thought Ted Urquhart grimly.

It was his first clear thought as he jerked himself at last out of the stupor into which he'd been plunged by a blow dealt in the dark.

Slowly and heavily he walked up the rest of that darkened scented corridor of an avenue into the lighted hall of his house.

And there slipped into the hall behind him the girl who was not his. The girl who'd murmured, "Oh, Cecil" in a tone as soft as the sound of that good-bye kiss which had been overheard by another man.

Ted Urquhart stood aside for her to pass. A black transparent scarf that she'd put on trailed away from her white dress. He picked it up and handed it to her.

"Oh, thanks," she said a little wearily, as she passed upstairs. "Good-night!"

"Good-night."

He had not meant to look at her. But for one instant his eyes strayed to her face—not lighted

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up by any mischief now. That mouth of hers was grave. And was it a wet gleam on her eye-lashes? —Yes.

Of course.

She'd been crying because that young—that young Bray had had to go. "Oh, Cecil," she'd sighed. He called her "Miss Fayre," Urquhart had noticed, before people. For some reason or other it was not announced yet. But they were sweethearts all right.

That soft exclamation, that other soft sound were no further business of Ted Urquhart's. For a moment he stood, however, torturing himself with the remembrance of them, and gripping the balustrade on which his hand rested.

Then he let it go with a little jerk.

Yes. That ended it. Very well.

It was a very tight-lipped young man who took his peg of whisky rather brown, Mr. Beeton noticed, before preparing to go off early to his room.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I think you overlooked this," said the butler. "This letter came for you by the last post, sir."

Ted Urquhart took that letter upstairs with him.

In his room he glanced at it. A thin foreign envelope, the address of the Court scrawled over that of his Camp. It had been forwarded from South America. Then he saw, above the hasty re-direction, his name in a clear pretty writing he knew very well.

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Eleanor's. This was a letter of hers that had reached the Camp just after he'd left it, and it had been sent on to follow him here. It must be weeks old by now. And he might expect now to have these re-directed letters from her turning up every week, for she would have written her duty-letter to her *fiancé* for three mail-days in succession, not knowing that even as she wrote he was already on his way home to take her by surprise.

A pretty collection of surprises it had turned out to be from the first moment that he'd seen, not Eleanor, but her lovely Second-in-command——

"Here! None of that." Urquhart peremptorily called off his own thoughts as if they'd been straying spaniels. He'd got, somehow or other, to keep his mind off that savagely rankling memory of what he'd just heard in the lime-walk. "Better read the letter."

He tore it open. He set it down before him on the dressing-table, beginning listlessly enough to read it while he undressed.

He began listlessly. But presently he lifted his head with a little movement that was reflected in the Sheraton mirror; he stood for a moment alert, a graceful, wide-shouldered figure of a man in shirt sleeves, his braces dangling about his narrow loins, while he read again.

"My dear Ted——

"Of course I am not offended that your

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plans do not allow you to come over this year to see me, I quite understand. I am such a busy person Myself "——

Here followed the catalogue of Miss Urquhart's activities for the summer. Her *fiancé* could imagine the little brown head conscientiously writing them all down; the dusky head bent over the paper. Then came the phrases which—he didn't know why—had arrested him.

" In fact, I must break off now to attend to the Head of one of my Clubs. (This sounds rather like golf, doesn't it? She might quite well be described as ' The Driver ' too !) "

Ted Urquhart's eyes left the letter and turned towards the closed white door of his room almost as though he thought he had heard a call. Yet there had been no sound. Then they returned to that last paragraph. Then he found himself looking away again, and staring, without any reason, at the long serried row of his boots—foot-gear of every make and material and several nationalities. What was there about this part of the letter that had given him a sense of being puzzled over something? He read it again.

Then it dawned upon him.

He thought, " *How unlike Eleanor* to write that ! "

A couple of hours later the young man, tossing

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and turning between his blankets in the dark, clutched at that thought again. He would have clutched at any idea that would distract him even for a moment from the black jealousy and despair caused by that memory of a man's name murmured in a girl's voice——

"Oh, Cecil!"

—and the other sound . . . the other death-knell to his hope. . . . This brooding would not do. He fixed his mind resolutely on that letter of Eleanor's.

Yes, by Jove. How oddly unlike Eleanor that last paragraph had read!

He simply couldn't imagine Eleanor writing so primly, so characteristically up to that point, and then "letting herself go" in a sentence that seemed almost to be laughing at her own solemnity. That gay little gibe! From a girl who took everything with such a deadly seriousness! All her other letters to him had been so consistently typical of her. None of them had shown a gleam of that sort——

"Stop a bit, though. There was the other letter with that unaccountable Thing in it," young Urquhart reminded himself, sitting up suddenly in bed an hour or so later. "By Jove, yes. Supposing to-night's letter proves to be a sort of sidelight upon that other one? I say! I'll have a look at it now."

He slipped out of bed and snapped on the lights.

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He went to the dressing-table. Here, beside pipe, pouch and matches, lay a worn and favourite pig-skin pocket-book. He picked it up and took out of it——

First, his receipted bill from that little French hotel.

Next, a little sheaf of visiting cards with addresses ; home-people he'd promised to " look-up " for some of his pals at the Camp.

Then, some letters. No ! It wasn't this one, or this one. . . . Here it was, at last, in one of the well-known grey envelopes. He shook out of the envelope a handful of once-pink rose-petals, and laid them carefully aside on the open pocket-book. He scarcely looked at them now ; he'd looked at them often enough already. It was the letter at which he now stared. The only other one of Eleanor's letters which was uncharacteristic of the girl as he knew her. The one he'd received to-night seemed to have a girl's laugh rippling between the lines. But this first one held something more betraying. Something which, because it was incomprehensible, Ted Urquhart had " given up." Well, here it was for him to puzzle over once again.

The letter that had brought him home !

In his lighted room, orderly and deathly silent, it seemed for a moment as if something were holding its breath behind the shoulder of that young man in pyjamas. There was nothing specially striking in the actual contents of that letter. " And she

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ends up so precisely," he mused for the hundredth time, " with her

' There seems to be nothing else that would interest you '——

And then, by George, over the page "——

He turned it.

—" there's *this* ! "

The sight of "*This* " would have been a petrifying shock to the girl who'd written it.

For Rosamond Fayre, secretary, prided herself on her neatness and accuracy. She boasted that she'd never made the mistakes that every writer of letters is said to make once in a life-time. Namely, to slip A.'s letter into an envelope addressed to B., or to tear up the fair copy of a note while sending off the rough draft.

But it was a compromisingly rough draft that Ted Urquhart held now in his hand.

He held it up to the light, as if he hadn't already held it so many a time, to examine that scribbled——

" *Darling. My darling !* "

That was on it. It was all scrawled over with a pen-drawn spiral that looked like "*the smoke from the engine* " of a child's drawing. There were one or two beginnings of it, a copper-plate "*Dar—*" "*My darl—*"

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" *My darling!* "

From Eleanor, if you please. Yes, from Eleanor, who never by any chance called him anything but his name.

And so much had been packed into the time since that sunny morning in France when he'd met—*No! None of that again*—since the day he'd met Eleanor that he'd forgotten to notice the contrast between herself and that one letter of hers.

And now, in this second letter that he'd received, he seemed to trace the possibility of some clue to the mystery, of the astonishing difference between the Eleanor who wrote and the Eleanor who spoke.

He put down the letter with the "*Darling*" postscript, enclosing those rose-leaves. Again he took up the letter that had arrived this evening.

Perhaps he might find in it something he had overlooked? He examined it minutely, from the "*My dear Ted*" at the beginning to the little flourish under the "*Eleanor Urquhart*" at the end.

Ah! Wait a bit! There! Could it be? Was it——

Yes. Tucked away, all but hidden in the loop of the flourish, his eye, now that it was on the look-out for it, detected something. Two almost imperceptible hieroglyphics; the marks of two crosses.

Cupid, his mark! For all the world over that stands, in a letter, for one thing only.

A WHITE NIGHT

Kisses.

From Eleanor? From the unawakened girl whose only notion of a caress seemed to be that twice-daily cousinly peck on the cheek? She had sent half-concealed love-messages to the man to whom she was, by contract, engaged?

Of course it might amuse a girl to do that, reflected Ted Urquhart, lighting his pipe. But surely not that girl? Wasn't she as chilly and youthfully hard as the unripest of the green apples in the Court Orchard? Or—here he knit his brows and stared into the puff of smoke—*had he been mistaken* from the very beginning in his *fiancée* Eleanor?

The clocks all over the house chimed One and Two and Half-past Two while Ted Urquhart, tramping barefoot up and down his bedroom and smoking hard, went on wondering (still resolutely) over this question.

A moth flew in, with a whirr and drone as of a tiny biplane, and circled about under the ceiling. His own were the only lights on, of course. Everybody else fast asleep hours ago. He wondered if *She* had cried any more over the departure of "*Cecil*" after she'd gone up— *Stop there! Think of something else.*

Was Eleanor, whom he thought he got "summed up," a girl he'd never really understood?

The rising wind outside dashed a cold spatter of drops against the young man's cheek as he passed the open casement. He looked out. Those farmer-

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fellows had been wise to get in their corn while they could. Out there in the indigo darkness it was coming on to rain like blazes; the light from his room gleamed on the lines of it as on the strings of a harp. He half-closed the window and took up those letters once more. And he was conscious of the oddest feeling about them; this young man who'd never "bothered" much about feelings until—fairly recently.

But it was with a little, sudden, warm thrill of positive tenderness that he handled these messages from a girl for whom he'd never had any tenderness . . . so far.

But supposing that came? Supposing Eleanor did turn out to be this utterly unknown quantity?

He'd heard of people who could be delightful, charming, and warmly friendly while they talked to you, but who, on paper, seemed cold and repellently stiff. Simply, they couldn't write letters. Perhaps, then, there were other people who could express themselves in letters, but who simply couldn't talk? Became cold, self-conscious, too shy to be themselves? Perhaps Eleanor's real self was the bashful, passionate little soul who, greatly daring, sent furtive "darlings" and kisses and rose-leaves to the lover she'd never seen?

If that were Eleanor, he must meet her. He must know her. He must get her to declare herself. The very thought of the quest seemed to bring hope with it. . .

A WHITE NIGHT

He heard the clocks striking Three, and stretched himself wearily. . .

Then suddenly checked himself, with long sinewy arms above his head. Ah! Another idea had just occurred to him.

There were those other belated letters already written by Eleanor that would be coming on, forwarded from the Camp. He might expect to receive these here, one at a time! They were already on their way to "Edward Urquhart, Esqre.," at this moment. One just sent on from the Camp; probably, one at the port of embarkation; one crossing the South Atlantic. . .

Would any of them thro' fresh light upon the subject of their writer?

Would they be entirely formal and flavourless? Mere Club reports? Minutes of meeting?

Or might they hold just a dash of the other thing? The dab of jam in the otherwise so very doughy nut? That remained to be seen. How soon, though? Each week he'd get one. . .

He dropped his arms. He turned to the ivory-leaved calendar that stood on the writing-table beside the leather-framed, faded photograph of his father in the uniform of a Woolwich cadet; he ran his finger down until it reached a date.

What an infernal while to wait until he got another letter from this new Eleanor!

Her letters were all he had to help him to find her.

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A regular paper-chase !

Find her he must ; would——

Here at last he found himself yawning.

He turned off the lights ; and the velvet darkness of the window-square was transformed to weeping grey as he rolled over in his blankets again.

He was dog-tired. Rain pattered loudly on the lime-trees of that Avenue where, half a life-time ago, he'd heard. . . what left him still aching with misery, frustration, hopelessness.

No. *No!* Not that. He was not going to think of it. He'd got something to think of. The hope of this new Eleanor. Getting on to the track of the girl who'd slipped hints of such a different personality into two of her letters.

Eleanor had thought of sending him those petals ; had smuggled in crosses for him to find. . .

Rose-leaves. . .

And kisses, of all things. . .

Here Ted Urquhart rolled over for the last time and slept.

CHAPTER XIV

A PAPER-CHASE

LONG afterwards it seemed to Ted Urquhart as if for many summer days he lived at Urquhart's Court two distinct and separate lives.

The Ted Urquhart of one life made himself interestedly busy about his estate. He listened patiently enough to the conversation of his Uncle on cyphers, ancient parish registers, and the Impossibility of War between civilised nations then of that present date (of June, Nineteen Fourteen). He took his *fiancée* out in the car, to pay a round of calls, as an engaged couple should, upon people in the neighbourhood who "had always known the Urquharts" (and a deadly bar to conversation he found it). He suggested to Eleanor that, as an antidote, he and she might do another round, of London theatres, music-halls, Opera.

"Oh, that's very kind of you, Ted," he was told, "but I'm afraid I couldn't possibly spare the time."

"Not even for a few evenings and afternoons?"

"Oh, I'm afraid not."

(What a *fiancée*! What an engagement! All this *must* be altered!)

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" I think, then," he said, " that I shall go up alone for a couple of days."

He did so. He looked up and haled forth to dinners and lunches such old schoolfellows of his as he could find. He beheld a youth who had been his fag make a century at Lord's. He took pilgrimages into the dullest suburbs to visit the faded, patient women-folk of some of his mates whom he had left, bronzed and keen and jolly and disreputable, at the South American Camp. He gave " the latest news " (publishable) of these young men, and received worshipping hospitality in return. He asked other men down to The Court for lazy days. He persuaded himself, quite often, that he was having a very good time at home. This was the first of his two lives.

But in his second life he was far more occupied. Those other surface things were trifling compared to what he was really doing. He was for ever keeping a look-out for that girl of his ; not Miss Fayre, who was engaged to that other fellow, nor the Eleanor he saw, up to her eyes in good works he could not follow ; but that new Eleanor of the letters.

It exasperated him to find how skilfully she managed to keep herself hidden away !

His *fiancée* was always the same to him ; matter-of-fact, dutifully pleasant.

He ransacked his brains for some opportunity to bring up the subject of those letters. Stupid—

A PAPER-CHASE

her own letters! How *could* he say to Eleanor, "I say, do you know what you wrote—?"

It couldn't be supposed that the girl didn't know what she'd written herself, could it? Yet it looked very like it!

In fact, young Urquhart was beginning to wonder whether he hadn't imagined the whole thing, when something happened to set him off on the trail again, keener and more curious than ever.

He received another of those belated letters from his *fiancée*.

The post arrived while they were at breakfast, which Miss Urquhart "liked early." Her father breakfasted an hour later in his room. So the young owner of The Court sat at the oval table, bright with the glitter of morning sunshine on Mr. Beeton's wonderful silver and Mr. Marrow's freshest sweet-peas, opposite to his *fiancée* and to the right of his *fiancée's* secretary. As usual, Eleanor's plate was snowed under with correspondence; begging letters, circulars, estimates. As it happened, he and Miss Fayre had only one letter apiece that morning. (He didn't allow himself to wonder who *hers* was from.) He tore open his travelled-looking envelope and began to read.

The crisp bacon on his plate was allowed to grow cold as he read. For it was a long letter. More, it was an interesting letter. That is, it possessed the factor which renders any letter, any conversation interesting to a young man.

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Namely, *it was all about himself.*

Yes! For the first time, his *fiancée's* weekly letter held direct questions about *his* work, *his* life out there, *his* thoughts.

These were interspersed, certainly, with more familiar phrases about the weather for the time of year and the people who had been to call. But this was the smooth surface; underneath was the unmistakable bubbling of curiosity. Those questions kept cropping up. They made him feel that a girl in Kent was saying to an unknown young man in South America, "I *will* know you! I *will* find out what sort of a creature you are!" It was just as he himself was grimly determined to find out "what sort of a creature" this Eleanor of his really was under all her reserves and pre-occupations and fussinesses.

One paragraph at the end mentioned a name now familiar to Ted. But it mentioned it in such an unfamiliar spirit!

"A very clever Collegy sort of woman was here to lunch; a Miss Fabian, who had a tremendous argument with father. She said she was sure that the Antagonism of Sex was far stronger to-day—though perhaps more hidden—than its usual attraction. She said that there could be no Peace in this contest until the 'hideous handicap' of being a woman was removed. I *wondered.*"

The girl who wrote that had surely never found

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that being a woman was any handicap? It sounded as if she had been demurely revelling in its glorious advantage, thought the young man.

He lifted his head to give a long and very direct look above the table at Eleanor. Absently she put out the hand that wore his ring. The other held a sheaf of papers. She said, vaguely in his direction, "Some more coffee?"

"Thanks, I've still got some," he said resignedly.

He re-read the end of the letter that was so uncharacteristic.

"Wishing that I could see exactly where you would be and what you would be doing and looking like when you get this

from

ELEANOR."

Well! Here he was, and she could see for herself, exactly, if she took the trouble to look across the table at him!

But no; there *she* was, deep in her blessed circulars! Absorbed in anything that had nothing to do with the man she had arranged to marry! Or was she merely pretending to be absorbed? Which?

Ted Urquhart determined to spring a mine upon her there and then. Up to then he hadn't said a word to his *fiancée* about these letters forwarded on. He was keeping that for a convenient and useful occasion. This, he thought, was the occasion.

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

He made a little rustling with the thin sheet in his bronzed hand, then sat back and looked straight at her again. Then he said, perhaps a trifle more loudly and emphatically than he usually spoke, "Well, Eleanor!—I have to thank you for a rather specially nice letter."

Eleanor looked up from her circulars behind the French, glass-globed coffee-machine.

"Letter?" she echoed, puzzled. "I haven't written you any letter, Ted."

"Not lately, I know," said Ted Urquhart blandly. "This one"—he folded it into its envelope and laid it on the table beside him almost with the movement of a man who is playing a card in some game—"this one must have reached the Camp after I'd left. One of those fellows forwarded it on here from South America. It's weeks old now. I'm glad I got it back safely, though."

He was watching Eleanor, hard, as he spoke.

It never occurred to him to watch the tall, golden-haired secretary-girl who made the third at this bright breakfast-party of young people.

But if at this moment he had happened to look at her, he would have seen quite a startling change come over the attractive face of Miss Rosamond Fayre.

It was gone as quickly as it came. The next moment she was apparently deep in the one letter that had come for her. But in reality she was keenly on the alert. A sudden fright had taken

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her. For what the secretary-girl was thinking was——

"Now! I see what's happened! Eleanor's dear Ted has just got *one of the letters that I wrote to him, for her!* And he suspects something! He knows that Eleanor never wrote it! He knows! She's caught—that is, *we're* caught! Oh——"

She would have given her month's salary to know even which one of those proxy-letters it was. If only Eleanor's dear Ted would (but of course he wouldn't) give some hint now about which phrase it was that he found so "specially nice!"

With perfect outward composure Miss Fayre helped herself to a piece of toast and began to butter it.

Anyhow, he had said he was "glad he'd got it." That ought to apply to any letter from one's *fiancée*, though.

The question was, did Eleanor realise what had just happened? No! She didn't seem to, thought Eleanor's secretary, with her eyes fixed on her own share of the morning's post. It was nothing much (a mere note about some alterations to be made in Miss Fayre's costume by that obscure but clever little dressmaker who had created the still unworn pink frock), but Miss Fayre studied the sheet as if it came from a declared lover, whilst her ears were pricked up to catch what Eleanor was going to say next.

Eleanor said casually, "Ah, one of my letters come back again? How quick that seems!"

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

The next moment Rosamond's trepidation over this proxy-letter affair had become absolute panic. For she'd heard Mr. Ted Urquhart's quiet reply :

" Oh, I've had more than one."

He'd had more than one? thought the quailing Rosamond. Then it didn't matter *which* of them he'd got this morning. He'd guessed something. He'd received letters here, from Eleanor, and this apparently was the first time that he mentioned them. Of course that meant that he suspected something about them!

Rosamond Fayre's blue eyes stole up, from her dressmaker's note, to the every-coloured bank of sweet-peas and above it, for one quick covert glance at the brown face of the young man.

Absolutely exasperatingly calm; inscrutable. A sort of irritatingly good-looking male Sphinx.

" Looking just as he did that afternoon at the Hostel when nothing on earth would induce him to give away his name," thought Rosamond resentfully. " He's not the sort of young man who will give anything away, ever, until he chooses! "

And the thought of the Hostel brought another; a thought of terror. Yes; to complete her own rout there broke over her the overwhelming recollection of the last letter that she had written to the address of " E. Urquhart, Esqre." That letter she'd handed through the Hostel window for E. Urquhart, Esqre., to post to himself, just after she'd refused to come out to tea with him. H'm!

A PAPER-CHASE

He thought this morning's letter was "rather specially nice," did he? *What would he think of that Hostel one?* Heavens! That letter would be enough to blow the three of them, breakfast-table and all, through the ceiling as a bomb would have blown them!

That letter was on its way to Urquhart's Court, to complicate matters, even worse. . . .

And matters were quite complicated enough as they stood. That probably suspecting young man was the master of the situation, thought Rosamond ruefully. She and Eleanor were something like fellow-conspirators.

It wasn't her — Rosamond's — fault! She'd jibbed; she'd said what she could! She'd done it under protest, to save her post. Still, she had helped his *fiancée* to play what now suddenly seemed like a very shabby trick on the young man!

And when that trick all came out, as it might?

Well, it might conceivably mean that Miss Urquhart's highly convenient engagement would be broken off, and that Miss Fayre's quite desirable post would be lost after all!

But this state of affairs didn't seem to dawn upon the other girl.

Obviously, Rosamond must have a talk over the whole thing, now, as soon as possible, with Eleanor.

CHAPTER XV

FELLOW-CONSPIRATORS

HALF-AN-HOUR later Rosamond Fayre tried to open the subject in Miss Urquhart's office.

"Eleanor, I wanted to speak to you——"

"I'm just coming, with the letters."

"It's not about the letters. Not the *business*-letters, I mean——"

"Then I'm afraid it will have to wait, Rosamond. We must get these done first."

The impatient Rosamond "took down" and typed as if during an examination for speed, but it was twelve o'clock before the morning's correspondence was out of the way. Fortunately Miss Urquhart's *fiancé* was also out of the way in the motor-pit with the chauffeur, strenuously busy over some hitch in the mechanism which was causing Her Ladyship (the car) to "get very sarcastic coming up the hills." Rosamond hoped the job would keep him nice and late for lunch while she had her consultation with Eleanor.

This took place on the smaller lawn beyond the gardens.

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Here, on the warm turf where the Club girls had waltzed on the afternoon of the Hen-party, Eleanor had now laid down sheets and sheets of newspaper. Upon these she and her secretary were going to spread out rose-leaves to dry for pot-pourri, that would be sent up to a London dépôt and sold in perforated vases for the benefit of some Guild.

The two girls walked up to the lawn together, looking the queerest contrast to one another; dark Eleanor, whose "good" coat-and-skirt of one of the more trying shades of shantung seemed specially chosen to conceal every line of her stiff, *affairée* little figure; fair Rosamond, tall and dainty and loose-limbed, lending all her own shapeliness to one of those ready-made voile frocks, rose-sprigged, with a belted and befrilled tunic—of which a thousand duplicates had been sold in the sun. . . sales, and which would look cheap and common enough on many of its wearers. It seemed impossible that they should have a single interest, a single occupation in common—this pair of girls whose handwritings alone were alike! Both girls now carried shallow, large wicker baskets full of the scented petals that seemed all ready to strew upon the path of a bride. They knelt down close together on the turf as they proceeded to spread the rose-leaves on the paper.

"Just like conspirators . . . down to the attitude! . . . On all-fours, just as if we were taking cover," thought Rosamond, ruefully amused.

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Then, with a "*Now-for-it!*" expression on her face, she cleared her throat. She began to explain, hurriedly and softly and almost as if she were afraid of being overheard, that she "had been made to feel rather uneasy, this morning. . . ."

Her difficulty, she found, was to make Eleanor Urquhart see that there could be anything to feel uneasy about.

Eleanor only said in mild surprise, "How do you mean, you 'think Mr. Ted Urquhart has got an idea that I didn't write my letters to him myself'?" She was sorting out long leaves of lemon-verbena, grey-blue heads of lavender, jagged carnation-petals to mix with the roses, as she talked. "How can he guess you wrote for me, Rosamond? It isn't very likely that he's noticed anything about our having the same sort of handwriting——"

"Ah, it's nothing at all to do with handwritings! It's not come to that yet. It hasn't come to his thinking *I've* anything to do with the letters. But I'm sure that he's noticing that there's something different about the letters themselves," declared Rosamond emphatically, as she smoothed that confetti of pink-and-white-and-damask petals into a thinner layer on her sheet. "I know he is."

"It must be your imagination," came Eleanor's concise little voice. "What 'something' has there been for him to notice? You wrote exactly as if you were me——"

"Can anybody write *exactly* as if they were

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somebody else? I've *always* known they couldn't! A letter's bound to 'catch' something characteristic of the writer! Something creeps in, like the tone of one's own voice, speaking! One can't help that, Eleanor——"

"But you did. I saw!" said the other girl reassuringly. "I passed all the letters myself. Except two or three, perhaps. There was that afternoon I motored Miss Fabian back to her rooms and I couldn't get back before post-time, or something else happened. But I'm sure they would be all right—these little white roses are the sweetest of all—they were just the usual thing, weren't they? I know how careful you are with all my correspondence."

"I've tried. Yes, I have *tried* to be careful," said the secretary-girl uneasily. "But——"

She paused. Here was something of which she had to make a clean breast. "In one of those letters to Mr. Ted Urquhart I'm afraid I *wasn't* quite careful, Eleanor," she admitted. "I must have been in a mood——"

She stopped again. "Moods" were things Eleanor rather despised, as Rosamond knew. All this was embarrassingly difficult! It's so much easier to own up to wrong-doing than to having done something *silly*! She took another handful of petals out of her basket and began again.

"Just for fun, I suppose, I sent something. . . as from you. I put——"

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Eleanor's dark head turned a little impatiently.

"Well? You put what?"

With a suspicion of bravado in her pretty voice Rosamond Fayre confessed to the ultimate folly of what she'd put. "Kisses."

"What!!" ejaculated Eleanor. And she moved still kneeling, so suddenly that she upset her basket. The rest of the rose-leaves spilled softly out into a fragrant stack before her. Above it she stared with dark, incredulous eyes at her secretary. "Kisses?"

Rosamond Fayre, feeling more than foolish, put forward an historic excuse. "They were only very little ones!"

"But you actually wrote that I—I sent kisses to——"

"No! I didn't write that!" Rosamond broke in still more quickly, bending over the overturned heap of rose-leaves as she spoke. "It was at the very end of one letter; hidden away in the twirly thing you do under your name. I think I wanted to see if *you'd* notice when you passed the letter; and you didn't. So Mr. Ted Urquhart probably wouldn't see them at all—unless he was looking for them. Two quite tiny ones I put; like this——"

She took up the small pencil-case she wore dangling from a silver chain, and, on the margin of the newspaper-sheet before her she drew a couple of those hieroglyphics over which a sleepless

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young man had pored and pondered more than a week ago. . . .

Mr. Ted Urquhart's *fiancée* contemplated those hieroglyphics silently and as if they were noisome insects that had just crawled out of the rose-leaves.

"I know," said Rosamond Fayre, abashed. "I know I oughtn't to have put those, Eleanor. You wouldn't have."

Eleanor, in her austere tone, answered at last. "I shouldn't have thought anybody would put anything so vulgar. Except, perhaps, g-girls like P-P-P-Pansy!"

Rosamond flushed deeply. She felt that Eleanor's reproof was just. She often felt (as girls surcharged with any warmth of temperament are so frequently forced to feel) "*I can't be a very 'nice' girl. Really nice girls are rather shocked at me.*" And she regretted that she seemed sometimes more akin to Pansy than to what "a lady" should be in emotions and thoughts. . . . Nevertheless she longed at that instant for the presence of the Principal Boy. Pansy could have "stood up to" Miss Urquhart in a way that Miss Urquhart's secretary couldn't.

Miss Urquhart was so "difficult" these days! Far more forbidding than the Eleanor of Rosamond's school-time, the dark-eyed monitress who had always been helpful and kind, almost motherly to the younger girls!

"They say being engaged 'softens' a girl,"

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Rosamond thought. "All I can say is that it—or something—'hardens' this one! I ought to have known how she'd take this——"

She said aloud, meekly, "I was afraid you'd think it very dreadful, Eleanor."

"A little vulgar, as I say; that is all. Still, it can't be helped now," said Eleanor Urquhart, with that line of displeasure dividing her brows. "And it doesn't matter—particularly."

"Eleanor," persisted Rosamond, still warmly flushed, "I'm afraid it—or more likely something else—must have 'mattered'—Made all the difference in your letters——"

"How? Were there any more of—those?" Miss Urquhart asked with a gesture of distaste towards the two crosses marked on the paper. "Larger ones?"

"No. Oh, *no*!"

"Or anything else of the same kind?" suggested Eleanor, rising to her feet and moving along the line of spread newspapers. Her secretary said, truthfully as she thought, "No."

"Very well, then. There's nothing to make him 'suspect.' He can't."

"But—He *is*! *Look* at him!" broke out Rosamond, rising also and giving a sweep of her long arm, as if she were indicating the young man who was at that moment engaged at the other end of the grounds; shirt-sleeved and sweating and grunting over—or rather, under—machinery that

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seemed to him such a simple thing compared with the motives and mind of a woman. "Do you look at him? Do you *ever* look at him?"

And she thought impatiently, "How impossible it is to discuss anything with the kind of girl who's too reserved to say a *word* about her lover! How much easier it would be if Eleanor were even the exhausting type who brought her hair-brushes into my room every night to gush over what he's like. I don't even get a hint of what he is like, to her!" And she persisted, urgently, aloud—"Did you watch him at breakfast? He was watching you, Eleanor, as a cat watches a mouse-hole! He was waiting with all his ears to hear what you'd say when he suddenly *burst* it upon us—upon you—that your letters were coming home to roost!"

"Have you any other reason," Eleanor enquired, "for thinking he's thought anything of the kind?"

"No, I haven't. But one can't help feeling things like that, in one's bones," persisted Rosamond. "The whole air at breakfast-time was *quivering* with something being 'up.' I *saw* Mr. Ted Urquhart looking it, I tell you!"

"Oh, you fancied it."

"I wish I had! No," said Rosamond gloomily. "Either he's caught us out, or he will soon."

"Nonsense," said Eleanor, a little uneasily, a little shortly.

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More shortly Rosamond took her up. "Well, do you care to ask him if he's noticed——"

"I? Ask him anything at all about it? Certainly not."

"Very well. Then we—you won't know anything until he chooses," prophesied Rosamond, kneeling again. "I mean until he's definitely got to the bottom of the whole trick we played upon him."

"Er—Did you get me a few sp-p-p-prigs of rosemary to put in with the rest? Thank you," said the restrained little voice of Eleanor as she stood over her. It added with less restraint, "I don't like your calling that a 'trick.'"

"I'm sorry. But I think you'll find *he'll* call it one," returned her secretary, stripping the sprigs of rosemary with fingers that shook a little from temper, though her voice was quiet. She was thinking, "If there's any truth in the old proverb '*Where Rosemary grows the Mistress is Master*' the bush I picked this from will be withered up by next year."

She continued to speak quite quietly. "Surely, Eleanor, you see that he isn't the sort of man to stand it? I mean what man would put up with having a stranger's letters palmed off on him, under the pretence that they came from his *fiancée*? Imagine a man like Mr.—*Any* man, I mean! When he finds out that's what's been done—well, I'm afraid of what will happen!"

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" *You* are afraid ? "

" Yes. Do you think I've nothing to lose ? I've my living ! " said Rosamond, sitting back on her heels and looking up at her girlish employer. " The reason I gave in to you about writing to him at all was because I didn't want to lose my post here ! That's what I'm afraid of now ! "

" But—I haven't been thinking of your going ! " said Eleanor.

" You may have to think of it ! " said Rosamond relentlessly. " Supposing you can't afford to keep on a secretary any longer ? Supposing you leave The Court ? Supposing your engagement—suddenly ends ? "

Still Eleanor didn't understand.

" Why should it suddenly end ? "

" Your *fiancé*," said Rosamond, " might think that trick was reason enough ! "

" *What !* "

" Well, *I* think so—now," said Rosamond, lifting those drying rose-leaves and letting them slip through her white fingers again.

Eleanor's face, looking down at her, at last began to show a dawning anxiety. She protested, " But I was so busy ! "

" Well ! " The secretary-girl gave a short laugh. " Tell him that ! "

" I—see," said Eleanor, slowly. She was silent for a moment as she stood, backed by the clipped box-hedge, looking down at the green turf and at

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the flower-strewn paper and at the easy movements of the kneeling girl at her feet. "You mean—that might seem so odd to Ted. Now I've seen him——"

"It seemed impossible enough to me before I saw him! But now *you've* seen him," said Rosamond, tossing her petals, "you don't want him to break off the engagement, do you?"

"Oh, Rosamond! *No!* Of course I don't!" agreed the other girl with a sudden fervour that made her secretary glance quickly at her. A new note of trepidation shook that little trite arranging voice of Eleanor's as she gasped: "Don't you see what it would *mean* to me?"

Rosamond nearly exclaimed, "Does he, then, mean so much after all?" But Ted Urquhart's *fiancée* went on, "How could I carry on my Club-work if we didn't live at The Court? You know, Father would lose all the estate money that Ted wishes him to use; and he has very little of his own, *I've* only three hundred a year of my own, from my mother. As it is at present, I am able to put aside more than a hundred a year of that towards the Hostel, and I can hand over fifty to Miss Fabian's Guild. And then there's the use of The Court for——"

The ruling passion again; the good works and the girls! Rosamond Fayre listened in speechless amazement; and, humbly enough, she reflected, "Yes. Eleanor is a *much better* sort of girl than

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I am. She's marrying money—but it's all for other people! Her only fear is for those Clubs and that they might lose what she can do to help them. She's willing to sacrifice even *herself*. Oh, I'm afraid I could never sacrifice *myself*. Not even for money! It must be my Pansyishness and vulgarity that makes me think only of the kind of sweetheart I'd like!"

Then came the wonder, "What about *him*? What about Eleanor's dear Ted?"

Judging from his attention to Eleanor, he was devoted to her, Rosamond thought. He evidently didn't mind the—the aloofness of his *fiancée*. He perhaps admired her all the more for it; thought it part of her unselfishness and sincerity. But when he found out that the sincerity had failed in one particular, *towards himself*? Wasn't the devotion more than likely to fail also?

But here was Eleanor saying in a brightening tone, "Well, there are only two or three more letters to come now. And even if Ted did think there might have been something odd about those, the whole question of letter-writing will soon blow over——"

"Oh, *will* it!" thought her secretary. "Not after he gets that letter I wrote at the Hostel!"

It was on the tip of her tongue to say so.

But, after all, that Hostel-letter, which loomed incessantly at the back of Rosamond's mind, had nothing to do with Eleanor. *It was not signed*

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with Eleanor's name. Rosamond was in no way bound to talk about it.

So she merely shook her bright head and said ruefully, "I'm not counting on anything 'blowing over.' I'm only sure that we both stand to lose a good deal!"

Now Eleanor was really troubled. She fidgeted with the handle of her empty basket. She, usually so prompt with what was to be done next in all her affairs, asked quite helplessly, "What *are* we to do if it turns out that you are right?"

"What *can* we do?" rejoined Rosamond, looking up again. "You don't think *he* can be spoken to about what happened?"

"I can't speak to him. N-N-No, of course I can't," decided Miss Urquhart. "Could *you*?"

"D'you mean if I were in your place?" rejoined her secretary. "But if I were, you see, I shouldn't have got myself into this particular fix. If I'd been engaged to—to anybody, I'd have written my own love-letters!"

"I d-d-don't mean that at all. I mean, could you go now and tell Ted,—you, Rosamond, yourself,—what I got you to do for me?"

"No," said Rosamond, firmly. "No."

"Then nobody will tell him," said Eleanor.

"Then we shall have to wait and see if he elects to tell *us*. Very well. There seems nothing else to be done."

"And then what?" demanded Rosamond again

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rising from her knees. "For then—especially after we *don't* tell him!—there's still the question whether he breaks off the engagement."

"Oh, it *can't* come to that!" demurred Eleanor, petulant with anxiety.

"It can come to whatever he wishes. What we did was, after all, *forgery*!"

"Oh, it was n-n-nothing of the kind!"

"The penalty's the same!"

"'Penalty'? You've a most unpleasant way of putting things!" said Eleanor, facing her.

But it was not Eleanor's annoyance that made her secretary tremble for her post. Rosamond answered without hesitation, "I mean the broken engagement."

"If it is broken, it will be your fault," Eleanor retorted quite hotly. "You will have done it, with—" again she pointed down to the coded kisses on the paper—"with those two—things!"

"No; I shan't. You'll have done it yourself," Rosamond insisted, "with your whole senseless idea of dragging a third person into it at all. Always a mistake, in *any* engagement! Always—"

She paused. Both girls were flushed now. They looked into each other's faces with hostile eyes. Then both at once seemed to realise that hostility cannot be allowed between allies making common cause against an enemy.

Eleanor smiled deprecatingly, though still on

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her dignity, and began again, "Well, *we* need not quarrel."

Rosamond said ruefully—

"I'm sorry I called your idea 'senseless'——"

"I'm sorry I said what I did about those—about your—message," admitted Eleanor. "I daresay plenty of—other girls might put that sort of thing in a letter——"

Rosamond's blue eyes fell—upon the strewn rose-petals that reminded her of something. She murmured :

"That—message wasn't very much worse, I thought, than the handful of rose-leaves you sent him, another time. You did send those!"

"Yes, but you told me to!" protested Eleanor. "Don't you remember? That was one of *your* ideas!"

"Oh! dear!" sighed Rosamond, "so it was——"

"Anyhow," said Eleanor, "those didn't count."

(English rose-leaves—in a South American camp! Worn at a woman's breast—carrying their message a thousand miles and more—treasured in a man's pocket-book even now—*They didn't count?*)

"The question is," repeated Eleanor, "what are we to do now? Can we settle what we are to say if Ted does ask anything?"

"If he asks, 'Why are some of your letters so different?' had you better say that you, personally, don't consider they are different——" mused Rosamond.

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" Shall I have to ask to see them all (if he's kept them) and then go over them with him and *explain* them? " suggested the engaged girl dolefully. " I don't believe I shall even remember which *are* my own ! "

" He'll soon tell you which he thinks are *not* ! "

" Oh, Rosamond ! Oh, why did I ever ask you to help me over the wretched letters ? Oh ! How I wish I hadn't even promised I'd write every mail-day ! Shall I say that to *him* ? Or had I better——"

The discussion prolonged itself until the two girls were even later for lunch than was the young man against whom they plotted.

And in the end, all the decision to which these fellow-conspirators came was the time-honoured decision that closes so many even weightier discussions :

—Namely, " For the present to let things drift ! "

CHAPTER XVI

"NOT TO BE FORWARDED"

MISS Urquhart's secretary was not the only person at Urquhart's Court who thought of "that Hostel-letter."

For presently the young man to whom it had been written, the young man who had been forced into posting it to himself in that French pillar-box at the cross-roads, yes, Mr. Ted Urquhart himself, remembered that last letter that was to come.

And he'd realised that there was something odder than all the rest of it about the posting of that letter.

Hadn't it been handed to him to post, by Eleanor's secretary, through the window of Eleanor's Hostel? But Eleanor herself had been at that moment in Paris. Now what was the meaning of that? thought Urquhart.

Why hadn't his *fiancée* written direct from Paris, where she had put in a whole week?

Why, in the name of all that was mysterious, had she left that letter behind her?

Was Eleanor in the habit of writing letters and addressing envelopes for him at odd times, and then

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deputing them to be posted, one by one, at the right time—or *what?*

Young Ted Urquhart, brooding over these questions in that second inner life of his, had a presentiment that perhaps that Hostel-letter might prove the key to a situation.

Once before he had reckoned up how long it would be before that letter reached him. This had been as he stood on the dusty, white French road, weighing in his hand the letter which he then imagined had been written to him by that goddess-built, golden blonde whom his thoughts had called "Nell"—

Never mind that now. Here he was walking along an English road that wound between English hop-fields, and reckoning up how long it would be before he received the last of Eleanor's letters that she had ever written before she met him in the flesh.

He remembered—and he laid his plans accordingly.

These were his plans.

He determined to say nothing to Eleanor on the subject of letters. To wait at The Court until that last letter arrived. Then—well, there was an open invitation to the house of an old schoolfellow in Wales, for some fishing. He'd fit that in. He'd go away, first making Eleanor promise to write to him. Then he'd have letters to compare. With luck he'd have some definite excuse to speak out his mind to Eleanor upon his return.

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It was a little thing that nipped Ted Urquhart's plans in the bud.

The old schoolfellow wrote to him from Wales begging him to try and fit in his week at once if he possibly could.

Ted Urquhart was obliged to go two days before he intended. Before the arrival of that Hostel-letter.

It is not necessary to describe in detail that Welsh visit, or how young Urquhart fished without very much luck.

Wales, with its jagged skylines and rich crazy-work colours should have been a change to him after those flat miles of dove-coloured weald about The Court; but the fact is that Ted Urquhart didn't seem to care what sort of country he was in just then. For the first time in his whole life he was more interested in things that were going on inside his own mind. He had moods, like a girl. . . .

Also he found the people amazingly dull. . . .

He never knew how dull the people found *him*, or what strictures the girls of the house passed upon the stodginess and the apathy of engaged young men.

Only, he overheard a remark of his hostess's that set him wondering again.

—"hope they'll be happy! But I am afraid the man who marries Eleanor Urquhart will find that he's let himself in for marrying S. Ursula's eleven thousand——"

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Here a door had shut.

What could his hostess mean?

Did she mean that his Eleanor was such a many-sided little creature that the man who got her found eleven thousand different types of wife rolled into one? He wished he could have catechised his hostess. . . .

Every day he received a note from Eleanor. An absolutely deadly one. Dutiful, short, and in the style of all her first letters from The Court.

But the Hostel-letter wasn't forwarded on.

Yet he'd thought he'd made sure of the date when that Hostel-letter ought to have arrived.

It didn't come.

Odd!

Now that Hostel-letter, with the French stamp and postmark under the South American scrawl *had* arrived at The Court.

Weeks ago that unbetraying grey envelope had been stared at resentfully, in a passion of curiosity, by someone who, standing on a road in France longed to open the letter, but knew that he mustn't. And now it was being eyed as if it were a bomb timed to go off at a given hour, by two girls standing in the hall of an English country-house.

Young Urquhart had held the letter, weighing it in his hand. Eleanor Urquhart and Rosamond Fayre gazed at it as it lay on the oaken hall table, on the top of a boot-maker's catalogue, and an

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advertisement for fishing-rods addressed to E. Urquhart, Esq.

"Here's this letter of mine—of ours to Ted. And goodness knows if there may not be something in it that'll give us away worse than the others did, if we could only go over it and see," exclaimed Ted's *fiancée* to her secretary in low, dismayed tones. "Oh! To think that it's practically mine—and yet I can't touch it, Rosamond!"

Rosamond, knowing all too well that this particular letter was *not* Eleanor's, returned "Well! I can't touch it, either!"

In Eleanor's dark eyes she read the unuttered longing that it were possible to suppress that possibly tell-tale letter; to burn it without saying a word. The engaged girl heaved a big sigh, turning away from the hall-table almost as if from a temptation. She murmured ruefully, "Well, it will have to be forwarded on to him in Wales. Re-address it with the other two, Rosamond, please."

"I?" remonstrated Rosamond.

"Of course! My dear! We c-c-can't have both our handwritings on the same envelope. That really might show something. You've the Welsh address, haven't you? With all those double Ls——"

"Yes, but—it does seem such an irony to have to forward it with one's own hand. Sort of signing one's own dismissal! And to tell you the truth," broke from the secretary-girl, "I hate thinking of

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his getting it behind our backs, so to speak, and of our not knowing what he may be planning against us until he comes ! "

"Wait till he comes then, if you think it's better," suggested Eleanor Urquhart, turning a flurried, irritable little face. "He'll be back in four days. Don't send the letter on. Only, if it stays down here, Beeton has such a c-c-c-conscientious way of re-addressing letters he thinks we've forgotten." She turned away again towards her office. "It had better be put up on Ted's dressing-table, Rosamond."

Rosamond took a step after her, speaking in the conspiratorial murmur which now seemed to be growing upon both girls.

"Eleanor, the servants know your *fiancé* isn't coming home till Monday. Mightn't they think it odd if they were told to keep the letter for him——"

"Yes, I suppose they might. Oh, dear, what a lot of things there are to be careful about now," complained Eleanor. "I suppose *you'd* better p-p-put the letter into Mr. Ted Urquhart's room."

Rosamond straightened her back.

She felt like using the phraseology of a rebellious housemaid, and saying, "That's not *my* place." Eleanor was growing more impossible nowadays ; her salary certainly had to be worked for, thought Rosamond. She said aloud, rather shortly, "It wouldn't 'show,' on the envelope, which of us put the letter into his room."

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"No," said Eleanor, also shortly. "But I hate going into other people's rooms."

Rosamond suppressed a Pansy-like inclination to think, "Well, it'll be *your* room soon ; that is if we're lucky, and if your engagement isn't broken off."

She took that letter, written by herself on an impulse now bitterly regretted. She went upstairs with it ; and then, stepping almost as softly as if she were a thief who might be stopped by an enquiry of "What business have you in here ?" she entered the young man's deserted room.

How that faint pleasant smell of leather-mixed-with-cigarettes seemed to pervade the place !

The tall fair girl stood for a second hesitating with the letter in her hand. She sent the swiftest glance about her, then gave one touch to her burnished hair before the glass on Mr. Ted Urquhart's dressing-table. . . . Then a sudden quick sound made her start violently, flushed to the brow. . . . Oh ! It was only a starling, whirring out of the ivy that framed the window outside. This dressing-table—here—was the conventional place to put a note. Rosamond put it down and dashed out of the room.

On the stairs again she thought, "I'd like to see his face when he reads *that* ! Well, he'll get it the minute he comes back."

Ted Urquhart came back late on Monday afternoon to find his uncle, his *fiancée* and Miss Fayre, the

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secretary, grouped in the bay about the tea-table, listening to the conversation of an elderly man, some friend of his Uncle's. Young Urquhart dropped into a chair beside Eleanor, who bestowed upon him a cup of tea and a half-deprecating, half-absent-minded little smile.

"Just when the only thing to do in the circumstances would be to keep her hold on her *fiancé* by being nicer and more on-coming than usual to him," thought Rosamond from the other side of the tea-table. As tactics, she bitterly resented Eleanor's manner to young Mr. Urquhart. "Of course a girl should make herself so indispensable to the man that he'd think, '*Oh, be hanged to letters! They're only stop-gaps anyhow. I don't care how many other people she got to write to me for her, provided I keep her within speaking distance of me now, until the finish!*' But Eleanor hasn't a notion of that sort in her head!"

And Rosamond turned her own golden head away from the unrewarding view of that engaged couple and began again idly to listen to what the elderly Professor-person had to say to old Mr. Urquhart.

It was a haze of words and phrases that Rosamond's acquisitive feminine mind "let through," as her shallow wicker-work basket, made to hold rose-leaves, would let through heavier grain. It seemed to be all about "literary criticism" and "style"—things that had far less interest for

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Miss Fayre than the slope on the shoulders of a blouse she'd been cutting out before tea.

Suddenly, however, her mind leapt to attention.

The old Dryasdust-man was violently tapping his palm with his forefinger and almost shouting at Mr. Urquhart, who looked intensely irritated, "but, my dear sir, the personal elements of style can *never* be eliminated! The plagiarist may imitate the writing, the general trend of argument may arrive at the same conclusions, but the *unconscious* elements of style remain." This Rosamond thought she grasped.

"Unconscious elements"—Those were not rose-leaves, or the little "plus" signs that stood for kisses, but *the give-away tone* as of a voice speaking between the lines, the things in writing that the writer can't help!

Good Heavens!

And men recognized the fact? These literary people called Bently, and Boyle, and—was it Faleris?—had had arguments about it all before Rosamond was born! There might be some pitfall here that she and Eleanor had never dreamt of; and they didn't know enough about it to avoid it; how dreadful!

Desperately the secretary girl turned to the expounding Professor. "That's very interesting," she said, as old Mr. Urquhart was silent; his grey elf-locks seemed almost to bristle with annoyance at being worsted in whatever this argument was.

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" But please do explain it a little more ; does it mean that if you had two letters, typewritten say, by different people, and unsigned, that you could be certain to find out which of them was written by the—— "

Here her pretty, interested voice trailed suddenly off into an appalled silence.

She'd met the eyes of Mr. Ted Urquhart full and square upon her. And he was listening, intently. He was looking as if this subject of the identification of a style of writing held some arresting interest *for himself !*

Instantly she looked away again, but not before the blush that rose so easily to her soft cheeks had flooded them with the deepest, most betraying pink.

" *He* saw that. Oh, *why* must I turn colour like a mid-Victorian missy always ? He'll put two and two together now," Rosamond raged at herself as that scorching, lovely blush faded slowly. " As soon as he reads my letter that's in his room he'll guess why I turned so idiotically red and why Eleanor's letters had the wrong sort of ' unconscious elements ' and everything ! There ! He's going ! " she thought in an added flurry as the young man set down his cup and rose. " In two minutes he'll find that fatal, fatal Hostel-letter on his dressing-table. And he's bound to say whatever he means to say directly ! This evening, for certain—— "

But that evening passed without event.

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Several days passed. And still two girls in an English country house waited anxiously, while a young man in whose sunburnt and restrained mask of a face the impatient eyes seemed on the look out for something far away, said absolutely nothing further on the subject of letters.

"There you are, you see, Rosamond! You were wrong, and it is quite all right," Eleanor reassured her secretary in the trite little voice to which all the self-assurance had returned. "Ted hasn't said a word, in spite of getting another letter that you'd written!"

"It's almost enough to make one think he hasn't *got* the wretched letter," thought Rosamond. "Yet I left it staring him in the face on his dressing-table! If he insisted on 'having it out' with me about the odious letter it would be horrid enough of *him*, But if he isn't going to have anything out, *ever*. *it's—it's—unpardonable!*"

The fact was that Miss Rosamond Fayre's first surmise had been right. Ted Urquhart had *not* found the letter that she had left on his dressing-table. It was lying hidden where he would not readily see it.

For as Rosamond was closing the door behind her that morning, a chance breeze from the open window stirred into a strong draught, had lifted the light, foreign-papered letter as it lay and had swept it off the table and down towards that serried row of young Urquhart's so varied footwear;

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brown brogues, black boots, soft moccasins, shooting-, fishing-, and riding-boots. . . .

It was at the bottom of one of Ted's tall riding-boots that Rosamond's Hostel-letter had found a hiding-place !

And the days went by—days fraught with fate for England, nodding over her sheathed sword.

PART II
IN TIME OF WAR

CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO ARMS

THERE came a time when Rosamond Fayre began to think that the Fates had doomed her to spend far too much of her existence with a pen in her hand !

Paper and ink, and the complications to which paper and ink had led—these futile, barren things seemed to have made up the whole of her life ever since that afternoon at the beginning of the summer when she'd sat down to write another girl's courtship-letter.

Well, her pen, of course, was Miss Fayre's profession. Clerical work was what she seemed fitted for. And she sighed to think so.

By the middle of August, Nineteen Fourteen, she felt she had good reason to sigh impatiently, not only over her work, but over her sex ; things that barred her from the life of glorious Action and stir and comradeship that seemed so much better worth living !

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For a fully feminine young woman of Rosamond's type considers, and will always consider, that the Sword is mightier than the Pen. . . .

How suddenly that glint of the drawn sword had flashed over England, even into such rose-garlanded, chintz-hung haunts of Peace as Urquhart's Court !

Yes : suddenly one day in its mellow oak-panelled dining-room, under the placidly-smiling Romney portrait, there appeared pinned up a brightly-coloured War-map, bristling with tiny flags of the European nations. In the pot-pourri-scented drawing-room bales of grey Army flannel were heaped knee-deep about Eleanor Urquhart, who would give them out to wives of Reservists in the village for sewing into shirts for the troops. And up in her own pretty room sat Rosamond Fayre the secretary-girl writing (on her own account) a Good-bye to a young man who would shortly be off to the Front.

She wrote :—

“ My dear Cecil,

“ Thank you for your letter, which I was so very glad to get. It's splendid that you Territorials will, as you say, be allowed a look-in at the present show, and I do congratulate you with all my heart.

“ For the first time in my life I would change places with a man, just so as to be a soldier. It's

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in War-time that you score. I suppose that if he were alive now my dear old boy would be going out, with luck, with your Draft."

Then she paused. This was not the way she really wished to write. She would have liked to send a really warm, affectionate letter to her brother's gentle and plucky chum. Gladly she would have told him that she was proud of him; proud to think that one young soldier who was fighting for his country had offered himself to her, and that her thoughts and prayers would follow him. . . . But it would be fatal, even now, to write that sort of letter to Cecil Bray. He would take it for more than mere sisterly encouragement, she knew. He would be back again with his innocent, persistent wooing, as soon as the War was over. Or even before. Poor dear Cecil, she thought whimsically, was just the sort of youth who might be expected to slip on the gang-plank of the troopship as he was embarking, to break a leg or a collar-bone, and to be left behind, cursing his luck that would not hold either in War or Love. Yes; Rosamond must keep her farewells coolly friendly if she wished to avoid another of those urgent boyish proposals, and another rueful "Oh, Cecil, I *am* so sorry," later on.

She must write on "outside" subjects only. Rather a pity that she couldn't employ Eleanor to write some of her letters, even as Eleanor employed Rosamond. Miss Urquhart's triteness would be useful here!

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And Rosamond wrote on :

" Even in this Sleepy Hollow of a house we are managing to raise three men. Beeton the butler went first. He is an old Naval Reserve man, and it seems he was all ready to rejoin before his orders came.

" Then Mr. Marrow the gardener here went off with the Yeomanry ; and the chauffeur has given notice and is going to enlist."

Here Rosamond put down that everlasting pen of hers and gazed out of the open casement-window above the writing-table thoughtfully. . . . She didn't think, at first, that she was thinking of anything in particular. . . . But she was.

She was wondering why the men raised for the Army at Urquhart's Court were *only three* ?

And Cecil's letter was interrupted while she wondered about it.

There ought to have been four men from the Court.

There was Mr. Ted Urquhart ; why, why on earth was *he* not going too ? Why wasn't *he* volunteering—putting in for some sort of a commission enlisting—getting out somehow to the War ?

For Rosamond Fayre, like a million other gently-nurtured girls, who could not have endured one of War's details, could yet contemplate War as a whole with a glad stir of the pulses and the deep-

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rooted conviction that "*Two things greater than All things are—One is Love and the other is War*"—Man's Big Job. Even so kindly men (while wincing from any hint of a woman's suffering) will think with a shake of the head of the woman who shirks the Big Job of womankind, and will say "A pity she doesn't have any babies."

Rosamond, the Army doctor's daughter, thought it not only a pity, but absolutely inexplicable that young Mr. Urquhart hadn't answered the call to arms.

Wouldn't they *take* him?

But they took slow, middle-aged men like Beeton? They took mere boys like the chauffeur? They took weeds like Mr. Marrow the gardener, thought the disdainful Rosamond, who, with all women, judged a man's usefulness entirely by his shoulders and limbs. Surely they'd jump at the sort of man who could carry castings and boilers and things up the Andes? Why, look at him! His clean "fit"-ness; his whole impression of lithe strength! Even Eleanor's girls had thought he "looked as if he might be a soldier" that time in France, so long ago, when they hadn't known who he was! *Wasn't* he going to turn soldier, *now*? His hand was probably as well used to a gun as Rosamond's own fingers were to the silver handle of her mirror.

Of course it had nothing to do with Rosamond. It wasn't her business to feel pleased with him, or the reverse.

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But she couldn't help thinking that if she were in Eleanor's place she would be bitterly disappointed in Mr. Ted Urquhart. Even poor dear Cecil Bray, who was so much younger and who wasn't even a soldier's son, who had never been further away from Oxford than Florence, even he was showing himself to be after all more of a man than the other!

The thought of Cecil brought her back to his letter. The ink upon the paper was black and dry at the last sentence.

Slowly Cecil's letter was resumed.

"The Urquharts themselves have the intellectual, 'enlightened' Angell-ic sort of way of looking at the War, I think. Old Mr. Urquhart is one of those people who have always declared that War is now impossible, and that it has no part in our modern civilisation, our modern culture. And now he quite calmly says he's like Archimedes, poring over his documents, while the armies rage outside his tent. Miss Urquhart thinks that 'All War is so Wrong?' The only side she can see of it is that the husbands of so many of her old Club-girls are Reservists and that the pay their wives are allowed is so scandalously small. I am sure it will be supplemented by Miss Urquhart's last halfpenny.

"Will you please remember me to your Mother when you write to her"—

Rosamond thought with a lump in her throat of

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gentle, grey-haired Mrs. Bray. She wished she might add another message. She envied her ; she thought it must be wonderful to be the mother of a fighting son. . . . This she concluded to leave out. So she ended up—

—"and wishing you the best of luck, and plenty to do, and a safe return,

" I remain, my dear Cecil,

" Your old friend,

" Rosamond Fayre."

As she fastened the envelope she heard the sound of a quick footstep go past her door. Mr. Ted Urquhart's. How light-heartedly he was whistling as he turned into his own room !

And yet he was turning his back on what other young men of his kind were eager to meet !

Here, however, Rosamond Fayre's conclusions about the young master of The Court were quite wrong.

She did not know that long, long ago Ted Urquhart, who had trained as a Civil Engineer, had passed specially well in some technically military examination, had been recommended for a commission in the R.E. Special Reserve, and had put in the requisite drills at Aldershot before he went out to that work in South America. . . .

And at this moment he was fuming that some

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detail of red tape prevented him from joining upon the instant. Still, waiting was discipline to which he must accustom himself.

And letters were not the only things upon which this young man could keep his mouth shut ; he had not mentioned a word of his plans for joining, either to his uncle or to his *fiancée*.

Eleanor ! She was the girl he was to marry, but there was not a girl or woman in the land to whom he would not presently stand in a direct relation—that of protector—the man behind the gun.

Up in his room he moved about, whistling, pacing up and down, trying to kill the time that dragged so before the authorities should find all in order ; making himself ready as if he might hope to embark next day.

There was another copy of a birth-certificate to be turned up, too. . . .

Also he might decide which of his smaller personal possessions could travel with him as part of his Service-kit. . . . His flask ; he must get a lighter concern than that. A housewife he had. " Wire-nippers, mustn't forget," he interrupted the whistle to mutter. Then he went on whistling as he sorted receipted bills—" Hand over to Uncle Henry ") and took out his worn letter-case (" Might get a smaller one "). On the Elizabethan bed was spread out that business-like invention of a soldier's wife, the newly-patented *Manœuvre-rug* (" God-send, that, presently "). Some of these boots might

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be cleared away. . . . He lifted one of his riding-boots, turned it upside down to examine some slight sign of wear on the heel.

Once more, and very suddenly, he stopped that whistle.

He did not go on whistling.

There had dropped from its hiding-place in his boot, a letter.

He picked it up from the green carpet ; gave it one glance, recognised the French stamp and the writing. Ah !

Yes ; here it was. Delayed, long-looked-for, mislaid, and come back to him at last.

" The Hostel-letter ! "

That white Hostel was deserted now ; its green shutters barred, and all that friendly coast was to-day a waste for the Enemy. . . .

And here, a written relic of those days of English holiday-making on French soil, was this letter.

Hurriedly young Urquhart tore it open. Quickly he read through *the one sentence* that it contained.

Then his brown hand, holding the letter, dropped.

" What ? " he said curtly, aloud.

Again he held up the grey sheet, fastening his eyes upon the curly clear writing of it as if he would learn it off by heart.

Yet there was only one sentence in it, and such a short and simple one. It would not take much committing to memory. And he knew it : his memory would hold it for ever, together with a

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picture. . . . The War had almost blotted out that picture; now it returned, almost obliterating all sterner images for a moment.

The picture of a golden-haired girl in white sitting writing at an open window, then raising her small burnished head on its creamy neck to tell him quietly that she had changed her mind about coming out with him that afternoon, and that he might post the letters for her instead.

This was all that she had written in the Hostel-letter :

" Mr. Urquhart, I know quite well who you are."

And she'd signed it with her own name,

" ROSAMOND FAYRE."

He thrust the note into his pocket and stood frowning. . . .

Presently he thought he'd better attend to the business in hand, turn up that blessed certificate, Where was the thing? He turned out the case of stationery on his writing-table—nothing there. He went to the small drawer where he kept handkerchiefs, turned it upside down upon the bed, glanced at the folded square of newspaper that had been taken to line the drawer. A headline took his eye : *" The Naval Meeting at Kiel. Arrival of the British Squadron."* Extraordinarily incongruous that looked to eyes that were now accustomed to such different items in the *Morning Post* ! This was only dated June 24, yet it seemed part of something

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as remote and futile as his Uncle Henry's documents ; an irresponsible echo from the Past.

The letter in his pocket might also stand for something just as remote, just as completely crowded out by weightier happenings. . . .

But young Urquhart, keen as he was on those happenings, could not resign himself philosophically to forgetting the other. Not yet . . . not entirely. . .

So when he had run the missing birth-certificate to earth under his mirror he turned again to the letter, and pondered over it. . . .

Putting detail to detail ; Eleanor's preoccupations, the mischievous temperament of that other girl ; Eleanor's once more flavourless letters to him in Wales, the things that Professor-Johnnie had been saying the other afternoon about forgeries and plagiarisms, that other girl's sudden blush——

Seeing at last this letter of Miss Fayre's as the key to all those other letters, purporting to come from Eleanor, with that disturbingly unfamiliar note.

He saw it all now. Of course. That was it. *She—the secretary-girl—had written those others !*

If that proved to be so, thought Ted, absently polishing the bowl of his pipe on his jacket-sleeve, it meant that all his hopes of discovering a new Eleanor were dashed to the ground.

There was no " new " Eleanor.

There remained only the cold-blooded little cousin whom he ought to marry, and the other girl who was going to marry another man.

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That was a pretty cheerless look-out.

Still, he might make sure ; quite sure.

And anyhow he'd be off, somewhere where he trusted it wouldn't seem to matter so frightfully much which girl he was engaged to of all those that he had "left behind him"

He slipped that pipe into his pocket again and took himself quickly out of his room.

At the head of the stairs he encountered that other girl, Eleanor's secretary ; she came out of her room behind him. He stopped dead, and wheeled round to face her.

And she, with the letter to Cecil Bray in her hand, tilted her burnished head slightly to glance up at Ted Urquhart, and thought to herself, " M'well, you don't *look* the sort of young man who would be gun-shy. So perhaps it isn't that ? Perhaps you feel you've other responsibilities to attend to ; this lovely old Court, and so forth ? Still, I should have thought you'd have liked to take a hand, yourself, in defending it ? To know you'd helped to stop Them from trampling their war-horses all across its lawn, and from making bonfires of its old carved oak——"

These comments Miss Fayre naturally kept to herself. But the whole spirit of them was allowed to inform her meek enquiry as to whether Mr. Urquhart could tell her " how you ought to address a letter to a Territorial officer who had volunteered

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for Active Service ; was it just Esquire, or did you, in time of war, put ' Lieutenant ' ? ”

He answered her briefly.

He was perfectly conscious of that unuttered feminine fling at a defaulter so young and so able-bodied ; he was also conscious that he could retaliate very completely if he chose.

She didn't deserve to be so beautiful, he thought.

She had the assurance to smile at him, and to say lightly, “ Please go on ; I mustn't pass you on the stairs. It means a fight—that is, it means that we shall quarrel.”

“ That would be a pity,” said young Urquhart shortly.

He went down a step. Then he paused.

“ One moment, Miss Fayre——”

It was in his mind to go on, ‘ D'you mind coming out into the garden while we get something cleared up between us ? . . . Yes ; there is something I wanted to say. . . . To begin with—You don't *look* the kind of girl who'd forge. Why did you do it ? ”

But he thought better of it. After all, this was a thing he had to speak to her employer about first.

Behind him the voice of the secretary said, just a little apprehensively, “ Yes ? ”

“ Oh—er—I only wanted to ask,” he said, “ if you knew where I should find Eleanor ? ”

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"She is in the drawing-room," said Miss Fayre, and in her voice there might have been detected a note of relief mingled with some exasperation.

He went to find Eleanor in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER II

THE WHITE FEATHER

ABOUT the Court drawing-room that grey Army flannel still lay in drifts, shrouding the pinks and peaches and creams of the summery chintz, and heaping the soft dead-rose-coloured Aubusson carpet. On every chair were stacked green cardboard boxes, half-unpacked, with parcels of shirts, socks, mufflers, pyjamas, every sort of undergarment that the troops might or might not require ; all ordered as patterns by Miss Urquhart.

The small, grey-gowned brunette herself was sitting in one of the window-seats with her back to the sun-bathed Terrace outside, bending those dark brows of hers over the complexities of a Balaclava helmet that she was going to knit, when her *fiancé* came quietly in and stood before her.

"Eleanor," he said.

"Twenty - four, twenty - five, twenty - SIX," counted the absorbed Eleanor aloud over her knitting. "Wait a minute. Drop five and then go on—Oh, Ted, mind, please ! That's the pattern for a soldier's bed-jacket that you've got your foot on."

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"Sorry," said the young man, stepping back off one of the perforated plans of tissue paper that added their litter to the other signs of toil. "If you can spare me one minute—"

"Five, six, seven," murmured Eleanor.

—"I came," he said, rather more abruptly, "to tell you something."

"Oh yes?" said Eleanor, suddenly flurried, dismayed.

She thought to herself, "Oh dear! Is this what Rosamond said, after all? Is he going to begin about those letters?" And she made a movement as if she would put the work away from her lap. There was a frightened little catch in her voice as she went on, "What is it, Ted? I'll c-come into the office if you like, and get Miss Fayre to finish c-clearing up these b-b-b-bundles of stuff in here."

Young Urquhart reflected a little bitterly that his *fiancée* seemed able to rely upon Miss Fayre for doing plenty of her odd jobs; from tidying up her sewing to writing letters to the man she (Miss Fayre's employer) had promised to marry. But he only hastened to say, "No; don't trouble. I can tell you in here, it won't take a minute. I might have told you before. It's practically settled now. I've asked them to make what use they can of me for Active Service."

Eleanor looked up at him wide-eyed.

"Active Service?" she echoed blankly.

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"What? You d-don't mean you're going out too, to this perfectly horrible War?"

"I hope so."

"But, Ted," objected his *fiancée*, "you aren't in the Army."

"I hope to be," said the young fellow.

He went on to explain to the girl, in as few words as possible, his plans.

He concluded, "I hope this won't upset Uncle Henry or—you very much."

Eleanor shook her dark head with a sigh that was partly of reassurance. After all, ~~that~~ about the letters seemed to be a false alarm. Thus other was very startling, but it was Ted's affair.

"Well, I am afraid Father will think it such a pity. He considers all this fighting is so unnecessary," said Miss Urquhart, taking up her work again, "and really if you come to think of it, Ted, so it is. (Nine, ten, eleven; drop five again.) Why couldn't everything be settled by Arbitration? It seems so *absurd*, not. In the Twentieth Century and all, when we ought at least to have outgrown Brute Force, as Octavia Fabian says. She took me to such a splendid lecture about it not so long ago." The memory of that lecture restored the authoritativeness to Eleanor's sedate little voice as she concluded, "I suppose you've never read anything by a man called Normal Angell, Ted?"

"Yes, I have," said Ted.

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"Well, then, you see what *I* think about it all : wasting the wealth of nations on great hulking armies and plunging innocent people into poverty and suffering, *all for no reason!* I do think (five, six, seven) that it's so *wrong*——"

"Well, Eleanor, I'm afraid we shan't agree on that if we go on talking about it for ever," put in the young man temperately. "I think I'm going, with luck, whatever happens."

A pause, occupied by Eleanor's half-whispered, "Cast on ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen——"

Then, raising his voice a trifle, young Urquhart began again : "And when I come back—— But that'll be time enough to talk about that then, perhaps. There are a good many things that we shall have to leave standing as they are for the present, Eleanor."

He meant to speak quietly, even casually. But his tone betrayed something of what he was feeling. Eleanor, who was not usually susceptible to "tones," but whose uneasy conscience had left her rather "jumpy," took the point. She laid her work down again, and glanced quickly at him. He was looking away, over her head, across the Terrace and the lawn outside, and the expression on his face betrayed, even to her, more than his tone had done.

Eleanor felt she could not endure any more surprises, any more suspense over this thing.

She rose and stood before him, small and sallow and nervous. With that little scared quaver in

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her voice again she began : " Ted ! What ' things ' ? D-do you m-m-mean about—— "

" Ah, never mind what about just now," the young man said quickly. " As I tell you, it doesn't so much matter—— "

" Yes, but it does. B-b-because I've been very un-c-c-comfortable about it ! And I c-c-can't let you go like this. I must tell you that I think I know what you m-m-m-m-mean," protested his *fiancée*, in a flurry of stuttering. " Is it about some l-l-letters—— ? "

" No, no, don't let's worry about anything now."

" Yes, but I must. D-d-do let me exp-explain —— " she pleaded.

The authoritativeness was melting away from her ; so was that feeling of superiority which it was so easy to acquire in a lecture-hall surrounded by Octavia Fabian and her set. And as there were occasions when Miss Fayre craved for the unabashed fluency of the Principal Boy to back her up, so there were moments when Miss Urquhart longed for the moral support of a College-educated woman. It was not to hand. Helplessly Eleanor rushed upon the dangerous subject which had loomed above her ever since that morning of the conversation with her secretary over the pot-pourri. She made a little surrendering gesture with her hands as she cried :

" It is about those l-last four or five l-letters you got from me, isn't it ? I d-*did* make Rosamond

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Fayre write them. I am so dreadfully sorry. But, Ted, I was so busy—— ”

“ All right, all right,” he said, looking away. “ Never mind now.”

But the small dark girl trembling before him would go on faltering out her trite, childish words of explanation :

“ I n-never *can* write letters, any letters ! I'd rather do accounts, sew, anything. And I hadn't ever seen you, you know ! And I didn't see why Rosamond shouldn't. She *said* you'd find out. H-how did you ? ”

“ Oh, by putting two and two together in one way and another, I suppose,” he said listlessly. Nothing—except the Big Job—seemed worth wasting much interest over just now. Still, he asked, “ Would you mind telling me how long the thing went on ? ”

“ I'll l-look up in my notebook,” returned Eleanor with a little gulp. “ I've k-kept the dates of all letters sent—— ”

“ Never mind the dates. Which was the first letter that she—that Miss Fayre wrote ? D'you happen to know what was in it ? ”

“ Yes, I do,” returned the engaged girl. “ The first that Rosamond wrote was the one with those rose-leaves in it. Perhaps you d-d-didn't notice ? ”

“ I noticed them,” said young Urquhart drily. “ Miss Fayre send those ? ”

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"No, no. I sent those, Ted," replied conscientious Eleanor, feeling constrained to add, "But she said I ought to! She s-seemed to think that people abroad would like anything that came from an English garden, and so I p-p-p-put in those p-p-p-petals from the rose that she was wearing at the time."

In spite of himself he felt he must take her up here.

He echoed, "'She' was wearing?"

"Yes; b-because I hadn't a flower on, Ted," apologised his *fiancée*. "I'm afraid it was Rosamond's rose."

"And her letters. She wrote all the letters after that. Well!" he said slowly, "Miss Fayre copies your handwriting, Eleanor, remarkably well."

He was surprised to hear Eleanor reply:

"Oh, no, she doesn't. I copy hers. I m-m-m-mean, I used to when I was at school with her," explained Miss Urquhart, looking at the moment not unlike the prim little monitress of her class who was listening to a scolding for some only just discovered fault. "And I kept it up, and it comes quite naturally to me now to write exactly like Rosamond Fayre, whenever I do write anything. That was long before there were any letters to you to write. The handwriting had n-n-nothing to do with it, except that it gave me the idea that Rosamond might write any letter for me, if I were specially busy!"

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"I see," said Ted Urquhart smoothly. "And perhaps you didn't even need to see the letters."

"*M-m-m-most* of them I did," pleaded his *fiancée*, her little brown hands working with nervousness.

"I read *n-n-nearly* all of them, Ted——"

He was still looking blankly away from her. He said, apparently to himself, "At least it wasn't deliberate forgery, then."

"Oh, *no. P-please* don't call it that. She *s-s-said* you would call it that! Rosamond said you'd be most frightfully angry with *her* and *m-me* and both of us," blurted out Eleanor distressfully. She glanced about the stately drawing-room that was so unspeakably useful for her gatherings; she'd meant to hold Guild of Needlework Meetings in this big room all through the Autumn. Was this the end of all those plans? Every trace of colour had left the small strained face as Eleanor said, "I *sup-pup-pose* it's quite natural that you should feel you couldn't forgive me for this."

"What?" he said, as if jerking himself away from thoughts that had been far enough away from this agitated little dusky-headed creature who stood there almost pathetically at his mercy; his wife-to-be whom he had never loved, could never love.

But he found it no difficulty to speak quite gently to her now.

"It's quite all right, Eleanor," he said soothingly,

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lightly touching her compact little shoulder. "Please don't look so worried about it. I wish you wouldn't. Really it was nothing. You hadn't seen me. What did it matter? Anyhow it doesn't matter now. Nothing does, particularly—I mean nothing does, honestly," said Ted Urquhart. "The whole secret's out now, such as it is, and—please, please don't let's have any rot about—any talk about forgiveness and so on!

"Let's talk about something else," he went on hurriedly, as Eleanor with a little gasp of relief took out her handkerchief and blew her nose. "By the way, I'm going to tell Uncle Henry now about my having applied to the R.E. Special Reserve. But I want that kept dark for the present. Don't say anything about it, if you don't mind, to—er—anybody else in the house."

"Very well, Ted," said his *fiancée* gratefully enough, as the young man left her. "I won't say a word."

She had, however, something upon the other subject to say to her secretary.

It was said that evening, after Miss Urquhart had dressed for dinner in a Lady Mayoressy-looking gown of mauve satin, the sight of which upon a brunette afflicted Rosamond almost to remonstrance.

Rosamond herself was stitching up a rent in the overskirt of her long-suffering old black ninon rag when Miss Urquhart tapped at her door and

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entered, bearing herself with more than her usual dignity.

"Been having a row with him," Rosamond guessed from the aggressive tilt of Eleanor's chin, the line of her small mouth ; but Eleanor soon put her right about the origin of this added stateliness.

It was triumph.

"Rosamond, I must tell you," began her employer, "that I have spoken to my *fiancé*, and explained to him all about those letters."

She paused for effect, while Rosamond stood, struck motionless in the act of putting in a stitch. Eleanor added : "And you were quite, quite wrong about its making him so angry !"

"What ?" In her surprise Rosamond dropped her thimble and her reel of black silk ; and she forgot to pick them up. She stared at the other girl and exclaimed, "Wasn't he angry, then ?"

"Not in the least," said Miss Urquhart impressively. She might have been less ponderous had she not felt the need of regaining her own place in her self-esteem. She had been rather badly frightened ; and she had shown it. "He quite understood. He said it didn't matter at all. So that needn't worry us—you any more."

She gave a little nod and went out, still holding the dusky head in a very straight line with the back of the purple satin waist-belt.

Miss Fayre, left to herself, gasped, "Well ! I never *heard* of such an extraordinary young man as

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this of Eleanor's in the whole course of my life ! Wasn't angry ! Said it didn't matter ! *Oh*, how differently he's turned out from what he seemed to be like, that time so long ago, in France. It just *shows* that one can't put any faith in anything nowadays, not even in one's first impressions of young men ! I suppose all this is just of a piece with his not 'minding' staying at home and letting other people do his fighting for him. Why, he's just a—— ”

She dropped the mended flounce of her frock and primmed her red mouth into its most contemptuous curve. She turned to the door, thinking, “Doesn't seem to occur to him that he ought to volunteer, great, tall, sinewy waster ! It's enough to make anyone feel angry with him. And he isn't even man enough to be angry with *me* ! ”

Here again Rosamond Fayre was quite wrong.

For young Urquhart, who had found it easy enough to be forbearing to the apologetic Eleanor, felt furious beyond words with the girl whom Eleanor had employed. He found no earthly excuse for *her* ; none ! He would have liked to tell her so, the minx and hussy, who had been laughing at him all this while, in her sleeve—or so he thought. Of course he wouldn't be able to say a word. . . . Words, however, can so often be superseded by other forms of self-expression.

The first half-glance at Eleanor's “waster” of

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a Ted in the dining-room assured Rosamond that he was silently and coldly raging. Not at his *fiancée*. To Eleanor he talked, during dinner, brightly and casually enough. But at any word put into the conversation by the white-throated blonde who sat opposite to him at table, the young man became silent. And the casual way in which he averted his eyes conveyed more anger than the most furious glance above that group of plump, white china-limbed Loves that held up their burden of grapes and nectarines in the centre of the table.

"Frightfully annoyed with me because I'm in the secret of how off-handedly his sweetheart treated him," translated Rosamond to herself.

Then the secretary-girl almost forgot that question of the letters she'd written, over which young Urquhart fumed and smarted at the moment. She was wondering, still wondering over the question of the War and of why this splendid-looking specimen of English manhood was still a civilian at home.

"He doesn't think much of me; but I am sure I think even less of him," reflected the girl. And if Ted Urquhart didn't at that moment realise what is the attitude of the feminine and full-blooded young woman towards the Non-combatant-from-Choice, it was certainly not Rosamond's fault, as she, in turn, averted her own blue eyes.

"Won't he go because of Eleanor?" she thought.
"But lots of the men who went out were engaged

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and got married at the same time as they ordered their service-kit. Won't Eleanor let him go? Pooh!—has he got other duties at home that are important enough to keep him back? What could they possibly be?"

"... another chauffeur as good, in Ransom's place; oh, yes," Ted Urquhart was saying to his uncle. "Find one easily——"

"Well, that's not enough to stay at home for, then," thought Rosamond Fayre, crumbling her dinner-roll.

"And I've gone all over the bailiff's books for you this afternoon, Uncle Henry——"

"*That's* not so very important either!" pondered Rosamond, and waited, mocking, for the next remark. Perhaps that would be about something more important than the struggle for his country's Supremacy?

"They sent over from the village to ask if we'd spare some vegetables and pears and things for Eleanor's Refugees' Convalescent Home," young Urquhart was saying. "As Marrow wasn't there to decide, I said they could come over to-morrow with hampers, and that I'd help 'em to pick——"

"*Not* as important as fighting to save people from *becoming* Refugees!" commented Rosamond, silently.

But actually she said nothing further until dinner was over.

In the drawing-room Eleanor came to the chair

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where her secretary sat absorbed in the evening's news from those Belgian battle-fields, and held out a hank of thick, cocoa-coloured knitting-wool.

"Rosamond, I want you to help me with this if you don't mind," she said, with some of that extra dignity still lingering in her manner. "You hold it, please, while I wind."

Rosamond, dropping the *Pall Mall Gazette*, held out her supple white hands.

"But isn't this a job for Mr. Ted Urquhart?" she suggested, with a twinkle. "Some men seem to like holding wool, don't they?—of course it depends who it's for——"

"Ted is having his coffee with my father," vouchsafed Eleanor, beginning to wind her wool, "in the study."

"They seem to have plenty to talk about," commented Rosamond, mildly, turning first one pretty ringless hand and then the other as the wool slipped round them.

"Yes," agreed Eleanor, winding. "I know he had something particular to tell father."

Her small mouth tightened into its line of disapproval as she thought again of Ted's intention to volunteer for Active Service.

Probably just because all the other young men who'd been at school with him seemed to be doing the same thing! Eleanor was very much afraid that she knew what really intelligent people would call Ted—and the others. Yes, even if he hadn't

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been a soldier to start with, he had the—the sort of brand of it, born on him. Ted Urquhart was what was always called, "The Usual, Brainless, Army Type."

Really, as Octavia Fabian always said, these men were like sheep in the way they followed one another along conventional lines. It was "the thing" to be "keen" on the War. Instead of thinking things out for himself, and letting Eleanor tell him what those Peace Society people always proposed, advised. . . .

She wondered what her father would say.

"Needless! Needless folly, the whole thing," her father was saying at that moment in that book-lined mausoleum of a study of his, where Ted Urquhart had once sat waiting for his first sight of the girl to whom he was pledged.

The young man sat now in the chair he had occupied then. His impatient eyes were fixed on the polished floor as he listened quietly to his uncle's view of the case.

"Disarmament. . . . We must abolish these national antagonisms, so childish, my dear Ted! . . . Anyone would think we were still not far advanced from the stage of the savage with the club! . . . Deplorable, to me, these. . . . You remind me of your father. . . . I can only say you remind me of my poor dear brother Clive. . . . He'd be here with us at this moment had it not

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been for that old wound in which he took that chill——”

“And if he were here,” put in young Ted, as the remembered, smiling, adventurer’s face of General Urquhart rose before him, “he wouldn’t try to dissuade me, Sir. He’d be trying to get them to take him too.”

“Ah! It wouldn’t surprise me. It wouldn’t surprise me. . . . Poor dear fellow. . . . He was good for another twenty years . . . might have died peaceably in his bed at home here,” murmured the old scholar, as one who quotes the whole duty of man. “Incurably wrong-headed ideas he had, though. He was one of those people who think that, without War, heroism would decay. The qualities of unselfishness and sacrifice and strenuousness would rust away, he used to say. He said a War went through a country like a fume of disinfectant through a rose-tree with green fly on it. ‘A beautiful Cleanser,’ he called it . . . poor dear Clive!”

The son of this deluded Urquhart crossed one long leg over another, cleared his throat, and raising his close-cropped head, said, “Well, Uncle Henry, one can’t help what one inherits——”

“Inherit—Yes! And just as I was so pleased to see you back here, my dear boy, settling down in your inheritance——”

“Lord! I didn’t mean that! I——”

“I did,” persisted the elder Urquhart “It

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was the greatest relief to me, Ted. I felt . . . no further responsibilities . . . Eleanor and I, provided for, . . . while depriving you of none of your rights . . . she and you . . . getting on so well together. An ideal arrangement! I had hoped to see you and the child married this autumn, perhaps. And now—" He shook his grey locks. "Suppose anything happened to you——"

"I have arranged for that contingency," said Eleanor's *fiancé*. "She will have The Court and everything."

But again the grey elf locks were shaken. "I guessed so. But it will not be the same to me, Ted. I had always liked the idea that she would be mistress here—as your wife. I . . . You know I didn't always get on too well with your poor dear father," old Mr. Urquhart murmured on. "All strife is childish, of course, and—it always seemed to me as if it would put an end to its having ever been, if Clive's son and my child were to marry. But if you go——"

Here he suddenly raised the grey head. He spoke more quickly and decisively. He said something that gave young Urquhart a shock of surprise mingled with dismay.

"My boy, would it not be possible to marry Eleanor before you go?"

There was a moment's silence.

Then Ted Urquhart said quietly, "You mean almost at once?"

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"If you expect to go so soon. Could it be managed? I see constantly, in these dreadful newspapers," put in the elder man, wistfully, "notices of officers' weddings being hurried on, 'on account of the War.' If you and Eleanor could be quietly married before you left—it would set my mind at rest, Ted——"

Ted, after another moment's pause, said,

"Certainly. That is, of course, I'll consult Eleanor. If she consents——"

"It would be a weight off my mind, my dear boy."

"Then I will see her about it," said Ted Urquhart.

He rose and went out to the drawing-room with a half-conscious urge to get this thing settled at once.

But, he soon saw, it could not be to-night.

Eleanor's usual excuse, it seemed, must hold. A glance told him that she was again "*so busy!*"

She was winding wool off the hands of that other girl, into fat, cocoa-coloured balls.

Ted Urquhart, standing above them for a moment, saw the secretary-girl's face suddenly quiver and glow; she broke into a low but distinct and wholeheartedly amused girlish chuckle.

Eleanor said, "What are you laughing at, Rosamond?"

Rosamond murmured demurely, "Oh, nothing; only something quite silly that I'd just remembered out of some book."

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She guessed that the young man who walked sharply to the other end of the room would have given his ears to hear what this quotation might be.

But she did not mean to tell Eleanor.

It was an extract from Artemus Ward :

“ I met a young man who said he'd be damned if he'd go to the War. He was sitting on a barrel, and was indeed a loathsome object.”

Mr. Ted Urquhart hadn't even the grace to *look* a “ loathsome object ” !

CHAPTER III

THE DAY

THE next morning, a rather grey and chilly Sunday, Ted Urquhart came to Eleanor in her little "office" and asked her, with simple directness, whether she would mind fixing a day as soon as possible, for their marriage.

Eleanor, obviously startled, looked at him over the desk at which she sat. He had drawn a chair up to face her.

"Soon? H-How do you mean, Ted?" she asked. "I thought you might be going away so soon."

"So I may. That was the reason," he told her. "I mean if it's not—if it's not inconveniencing you very much, Eleanor—that I wish you'd see your way to marrying me, just quietly, you know, in the little church in the village, perhaps, before I'm ordered off."

"Oh!" said Eleanor, with a little gasp, "I never thought of that."

"I know it's abrupt," said the young man. "But you know lots of people in the Services are fixing it up this way just now. I believe they're

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making it much easier for couples to get special licences, or to get married without any banns, and . . . and so forth. It—er—I—er—Well! It seems under the circumstances rather a—a sensible plan, I think—if we were—— ”

Here he checked himself. He had nearly used the unfortunate expression “*turned off!*” But it is only the joyous bridal of which a grim joke may be made.

He altered it tritely to

“—married before I had to leave you, Eleanor.”

Eleanor asked, still in that startled tone, “Does Father think so?”

“Oh, yes! Yes. Uncle Henry and I talked it over last night,” said Ted Urquhart, leaning his cleft chin on his brown hand and his elbow on his knee as he sat a little forward, not looking at his *fiancée*. “Your father quite . . . agreed with me. I think he—he wishes it too, Eleanor.”

“Oh, does he?” murmured Eleanor. “Yes, I suppose he would.”

Evidently she was still very much surprised, almost dazed, he thought, by the suddenness of this plan. Evidently she scarcely knew what to say.

There was only one thing that Ted Urquhart hoped she *wouldn't* say.

Namely, that she did not wish their marriage to take place before he went.

For he wished it. He wished it, as he put it incoherently to himself, over and done with. He

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wanted to do his duty by his people—and then to clear! He wanted it settled for good and all. Also—he wanted to do all he could to rid himself of the power of an obsession that tortured him still, however he fought it down. *That golden-haired witch! That mocking girl who could speak tenderly enough to the other man—the man she was going to marry!* Ted Urquhart could feel furious with her. He could tell himself all her faults. (She was vain, flippant, irresponsible, insolent!) He could snub and ignore her, and put aside for days the thought of her. He could school himself not to look. But at the bottom of his heart he could not yet forget that fatal apprehension under which he'd been when first he met her; that delusion that she, and none other, was intended to be his. He must forget it. He must not run any risk of coming back, at the end of other fighting, to begin that struggle over again.

"If I were married," thought the young man in his desperation, "it would *have* to mean the end of all that."

So, anxiously, he watched Eleanor's little dark, restrained face, waiting for her answer.

It came, quiet and matter-of-fact.

"Very well, Ted."

"You mean you will, Eleanor?" he took up quite eagerly. "That you'll let me settle it up at once?"

"Yes."

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"Good," said young Urquhart, with a sigh of relief. "Now, the question is, what day will suit you?"

"Oh—how much longer do you think you will be here?" asked his *fiancée*.

"A matter of a week or so, I expect," he told her. "Ten days, I should think, at most."

"Ten days," murmured Eleanor. "Now, just let me look at my fixtures, please, Ted, and I will see what I am doing this week."

She opened a desk-drawer to her right, took out a neat leather-bound book and began turning over the pages, murmuring—

"Sunday to-day. Monday I'm motoring up to town for all day. Tuesday, the Reservists' wives here. Wednesday—I know there was something on Wednesday, but I must have forgotten to note it. I'll ask Rosamond. Thursday I promised to let Miss Fabian come down again to give her lecture to the Reservists' wives——"

Ted Urquhart sat, his glance straying about the small, neat room so full of a girl's kindly pre-occupations with her poorer sisters. His impatient eyes, rather listless now, rested on the framed "groups" of uniformed crèche-nurses with babies; on the files, the long red row of Whitaker's almanacks, the small side-table with the typewriter. . . . He was morosely glad that his wife would always have so much to occupy her. It would at least keep her from missing what he could never

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give her. Would she think of missing it? Would she, in her queer little matter-of-fact way, imagine that he was, naturally, as self-contained as she herself? Or did she just think, vaguely, that "men were like that"?

He watched her. And he wondered whether any other girl on earth would have taken just like this the function that used to be called in her grandmother's time "*naming the Happy Day*."

She had finished turning over the leaves of that little book. She looked up for a moment as she said composedly, "Friday is free. I could marry you, if you liked, on Friday, Ted."

"Oh, thanks so much," said the young man quickly. "It's really awfully good of you not to mind a rush like this—a wedding without—without any of the things a girl expects—a big party, and a trousseau, and a——"

He stopped again.

He felt he could not use the word that belongs to courtship as naturally as "Dearest" and "Darling" belong; the pretty word "Honeymoon." Not here. Not now.

He went on—"without any sort of a wedding-trip abroad, or anything. I suppose——"

"What?" said the bride-to-be, as he paused once more.

"I suppose you'll let me take you up to town for the week-end, won't you?" said her *fiancé* rather hurriedly. "That is, if I haven't already

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got my orders. We could—go round and look up various people, to say ' Good-bye,' you know—— ”

There rose up in his mind the relentless suggestion that the bride to whom he would presently be saying “ Good-bye ” would be very different from the usual (“ Brainless, Army,”) type of the soldier's young wife ; the girl who smiles resolutely through her tears, and whose agony at parting is kept at bay by her pride and joy at sending forth her man to fight.

Eleanor would feel no pride ; nothing but the Fabian-instilled conviction that it was “ a useless, wasteful risk of life,” . . . and “ *wrong* ” !

She herself was always so anxious to do what was “ right ”—even by him.

“ Just as you like, Ted,” she said.

She fastened the little engagement-book and opened the drawer in which it was kept.

“ Thank you,” said the bridegroom-to-be again. And he rose.

He knew what he ought to do now.

Up to now there had been no word of endearment between this engaged couple, nothing but her Christian name and his. Up to now there had been no caress but that twice-daily cousinly peck on the cheek. But now—when she'd just promised to become his wife within the week ! Oh, it would be too cruelly casual to let the occasion pass absolutely unmarked except by a cool word of thanks—

He drew a step nearer to the little stiff, grey-

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gowned figure with the dark head bent over the drawer of her desk.

He began, awkwardly, " Well—— "

He ought to call her "*Dear* " !

Why should it come so ludicrously hard ?

" Well, Eleanor," he said, " you've been uncommonly kind to me about all this."

A nice object-lesson he was, he thought savagely, for any young man who considered that which girl he got engaged to wasn't, after all, a matter of paramount importance ! But it was too late to think of that now. . . .

Eleanor's face was still averted as she slipped the book into the drawer.

Clumsily, abruptly, he closed his own fingers over her other little brown hand as it lay on the desk.

He'd *got* to say " Aren't you going to let me have a kiss to clinch it ? "

Every fibre in him seemed to draw back in revolt from what he had to do. But, dash it, he *must* !

He held her hand for another horrible second. . . .

And at that moment the door of the office opened, and there entered Miss Rosamond Fayre, dressed for Church, and carrying a large sheaf of white Bride-lilies for the flower-service.

The scent of them trailed behind the girl as she walked quickly through the office and into the drawing-room beyond.

Eleanor, hastily withdrawing her hand, called, " Oh, Rosamond—— "

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But the secretary-girl had passed through the drawing-room and into the hall beyond.

"Fetch her—just ask Miss Fayre to come to me, please, Ted. I want her," said Eleanor, putting an end to this interview on a bright conclusive note. "She might as well, before I forget, send off the notice of this wedding to the *Morning Post*."

CHAPTER IV

"ON ACCOUNT OF THE WAR"

THERE was no mention of its being "*on account of the War*" in that announcement that "*the marriage arranged between Edward Clive Urquhart and Eleanor, only child of Henry Urquhart, Esquire, of Urquhart's Court, Kent, would take place very quietly*" on the Friday of that same week.

Ted Urquhart, boyishly sulking (as older men than he will sulk) determined that Miss Fayre should hear nothing of his volunteering until he'd actually got his orders.

And Eleanor said nothing.

So that Miss Fayre, the secretary-girl, was left wondering over the cause of this unexpectedly abrupt arrangement.

Why were not Eleanor and her dear Ted, to whom the War meant apparently nothing but a crowding of the newspapers with one monotonous subject—why weren't they going to have a big wedding and a reception with scarlet-and-white tents on the great green lawn where Eleanor's Hen-party had gathered? and Eleanor was leaving herself no time to get her things! She said she

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wasn't getting "things." Truly they were the most unbelievable couple who had ever announced their intention of getting married "without any fuss."

" 'Fuss' means such different things to different people," reflected Rosamond Fayre. "To me fuss would mean asking all the people I'd never liked to come in a body and stare at me while I made embarrassing mistakes over the Marriage-Service. Eleanor calls 'fuss' any attempt at getting pretty new frocks! Well, even a young man who's strong and fit and says he'll be damned if he'll go to the War isn't any more surprising than a young woman who doesn't take any interest in wedding-garments!"

Such interest as was taken in this sudden wedding seemed to be supplied by old Mr. Urquhart. It was he who stipulated that since all the Mrs. Edward Urquharts since before the time of the Romney had been wedded in white, Eleanor must follow suit. Also Eleanor, though there would be no guest to see her, must wear the veil of old Limerick lace that had decked her mother's bridal. He fetched it himself from its casket of cedar-wood and brought it to the drawing-room and to the Urquhart engaged pair. And he would have thrown it over Eleanor's little black blot of a head, to try the effect; but here Rosamond Fayre, bringing in a note of thanks for Eleanor's signature, intervened.

"Oh, but she mustn't try on 'the' veil," said her

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secretary smiling, "before 'the' day, Mr. Urquhart ; it's so unlucky !"

"Rosamond always has some proverb about 'Luck,' " said Eleanor. "Or about what something 'means' !"

Ted Urquhart thought, "Yes. Last time she spoke to me it was to say what passing a person on the stairs meant !"

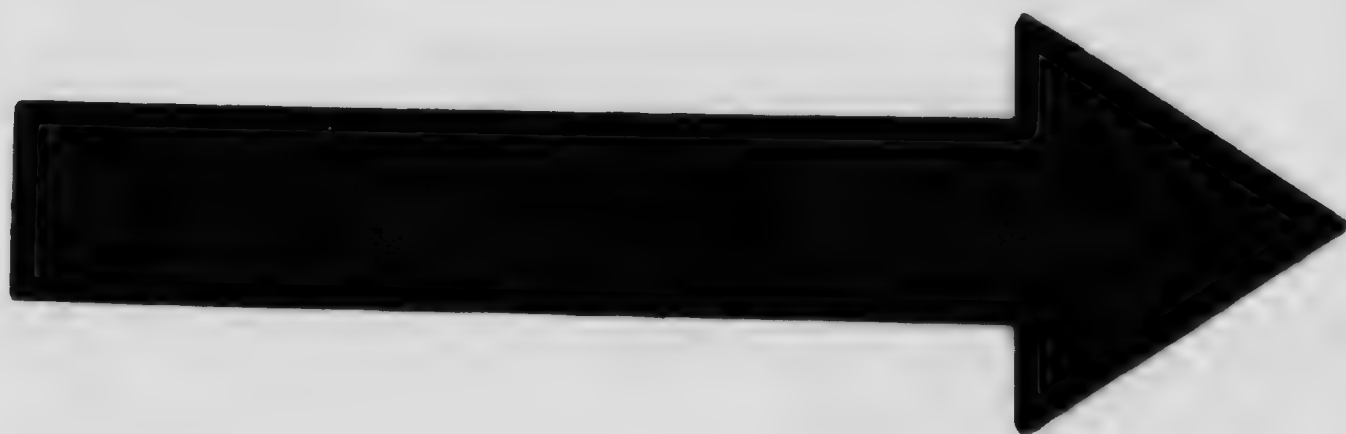
"Ah, my dear Miss Fayre, how refreshing it is to find a girl still holding to all the little decorative feminine superstitions !" sighed the elder Urquhart. "Were I even twenty years younger, and you ten years older, I should venture to beg you to wear 'the' Urquhart veil on 'the' day yourself. You would remind us of—ah—the nymph Arethusa smiling through the spray of the brook that engulfed her ! You would look like——"

Here Ted Urquhart, muttering some improvised excuse about a telephone-call, got up and went out of the room. His uncle presently followed him ; leaving the bride-to-be and Rosamond with the filmy folds of that Limerick lace spread out between them.

Eleanor tossed her end of the soft veil on to her secretary's lap.

"Fold it up again, please," she said, rather brusquely, "and put it into the bottom drawer of my wardrobe."

Rosamond folded the lace and then rose, holding it across her long arm. In her eyes was the sparkle



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of thriving rebellion. For now the secretary-girl had come to hate her surroundings.

She resented these so-superior Urquharts, who took it upon themselves, forsooth, to represent that civilisation for which other men were leaving home and comfort with a cheer, were tramping, unwashed and footsore and hungry, the roads of France, were fighting against odds, were giving up their young and joyous lives. . . . Why, sometimes she could not help realising that those valuable English lives were only lost thanks to the other stay-at-home, pacific English of the Urquhart type. . . . Yes ! They who wouldn't listen ! They who refused to prepare ! They who caused to be looked upon as unnecessary or contemptible that career which has been rightly called "*The Lordliest Life on Earth !*" These people were as truly "the Enemy" as Germany had ever been. England's strength had been sapped in English homes like Urquhart's Court !

Rosamond hated this Court. . . . She loathed this sluggish little back-water in Kent. . . .

She must get away to where she could feel the throb and stir of her country's indignant heart, her own thrilling in sympathy.

She spoke upon an impulse. "Eleanor, is there anything else you want me to do for you—upstairs ? Before I go to pack ?"

Eleanor, in the sofa corner, looked up at her somewhat severely.

"ON ACCOUNT OF THE WAR"

"Pack? I haven't asked you to pack anything for me, Rosamond."

"No. They're my own boxes that I want to pack," replied the secretary-girl evenly. "I supposed that you wouldn't be needing me any more now——"

"Oh, but——!"

"—and I've been wanting to ask you if you could spare me at once, instead of my waiting here any longer."

"Why?" asked Eleanor bluntly. "I don't ask you to go just because I'm to get married. I shall be going on with everything, just the same."

"I know. I imagined you would be," said Rosamond demurely, looking down at her and then away about the room. "But—I think I would rather go."

"But—quite lately, you spoke as if you would be so s-s-sorry to leave the Court. This," said Miss Urquhart, "is new, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," murmured Rosamond.

Then she lifted her bright head and looked full at the other girl sitting there among the mellow chintz cushions, backed by that stately, complacent room with its Chippendale and china, its prints, its whole air of "*Nothing can touch, nothing change me.*" And suddenly it seemed as if the antipathy that had smouldered so long between them, flashed into a flame.

Rosamond cried: "No! No, this isn't anything

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new. I ought to have gone away before. It isn't worth it. We—— We don't get on. We're such different kinds, Eleanor. It's been an armed neutrality, all the time. Hasn't it ? ”

“ Certainly not. On my s-s-side,” retorted Eleanor Urquhart angrily, “ there has been n-n-nothing ‘ armed.’ I hate any idea of quarrelling or—— ”

“ Then I must go,” said Rosamond desperately, “ or we shall quarrel.”

“ But why ? What about ? ”

“ Nothing. Everything. The War, mostly. Yes, the War. That must be—that's what has made everything different, I suppose,” cried Rosamond hurriedly. “ I can't feel that there's all *that* going on outside—while I live peacefully on here among a set of people who don't care, who don't understand. It's an atmosphere that stifles anyone who really cares. I want to be somewhere else ! I want to get something else to do.”

“ Very well,” said Eleanor, coldly displeased.

“ I'm sorry—— ”

“ It doesn't matter,” said Eleanor stiffly. “ I shall have to try and get a Lady Miriam Hall girl in your place. If you really want to go like this, at a moment's notice, I w-w-won't stand in your way.”

“ Thank you,” said Rosamond Fayre.

The flame had died down again. She said deprecatingly, “ I hope you don't mind—I hope

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you won't think it unkind and rude of me to go before Friday."

"Friday? Why Friday?" asked Miss Urquhart, adding, "Oh, when I'm married. Why should I mind your not being there? Of course it is not 'rude.' Nobody *will* be coming to the wedding, practically nobody."

"If you wished," added Rosamond, "I could stay for the meeting of the Reservists' Wives——"

"Oh, no. Please don't trouble," said Eleanor. "I can manage perfectly. When do you want the motor?"

Miss Fayre left Urquhart's Court before tea-time.

"Please say good-bye to your father for me. I didn't find him in his study," she told Miss Urquhart at parting. Her hand was on the door of the car as she turned once more and added to the small sedate figure standing in the ivy-framed entrance beneath the stone shield with the crest, "I hope you—you'll accept my best wishes for yourself, Eleanor——"

It sounded absurdly stiff, to an engaged girl of her own—Rosamond's age! But no stiffer than Eleanor's "Thank you, Rosamond. And if any letters come for you, where shall they be sent?"

"Oh, I'll write and let you know in a day or two," said the girl in the motor. "I don't know myself, yet, where I shall be going to, or what I shall be doing. Good-bye."

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The slow train was more than half-way to Charing Cross station before any plan had formulated itself in her own mind.

Where should she go? She knew nobody in London whom she would care to ask to put her up. Mrs. Bray was in town, Rosamond knew; and Mrs. Bray was always kind. But—could she go to Cecil's mother? " . . .

"Some people would think I might do worse than accept poor Cecil next time he asked me," thought Rosamond, with her blue eyes on the white column of train-smoke trailing beside the window and half blotting out the miles of outer-London backyards, where, among the inevitable washing, Union Jacks and French flags now flapped in the breeze. "Anyhow, Cecil is ready to do his duty as a man. Quite a dear—and nice to look at—and well-off—and adores me—what a pity that all these things don't make a ha'porth of difference when it comes to whether you want to marry a person! I can't. No. I won't go to his mother."

She dismissed also the thought of the tiny stuffy Bloomsbury room she had occupied while she was working at the Midas. . . . She had nearly two months' salary in her pocket; enough to do better on, at least for the present. . . . Pondering on her next move, she brushed a crumb off her lap, and rejoiced girlishly for a moment over the hang of the black skirt. Her little dressmaker had managed rather cleverly—

" ON ACCOUNT OF THE WAR "

The thought gave her an idea. . . .

At Charing Cross she had her two trunks and one hat-box put into a cab ; a grass-green taxi bearing in scarlet letters that appeal then so startlingly novel to so large a class of mind—

" YOUR KING AND COUNTRY NEED YOU ! "

and she gave the driver an address near Victoria.

It was in a side-street off Ebury Street that the taxi drew up before a modest brass plate inscribed " MADAME CORA : MODES, ROBES ET TROUS-SEAUX " ; and Rosamond's little dressmaker came to the door herself.

" How d'you do, Mrs. Core ? " said Rosamond, holding out her hand as she stood on the whitened step.

" Miss Fayre. Well, I never ! " exclaimed the little dressmaker, in a quick, twittering voice, with scarcely a stop between her words. She was a small, neat, fair-haired creature, with the alert eyes and void of illusion of the woman who has had to fend for herself since her youth. " If I wasn't thinking of you this very morning and your rose-pink I made you last month. How's it look on. Miss Fayre ? Doing you well ? "

" It's very pretty, but I haven't really worn it yet," began Rosamond, smiling. " I've——"

" Not had any occasion, Miss Fayre ? Nobody worth while ? Dear, dear. Come in, won't you ? "

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"Yes, I want to know if you'll take me in for some time?" explained Rosamond Fayre. "You used to have a room——"

—"and my young gentleman left it only this morning," said the little dressmaker. "Usual reason for everything these days, Miss Fayre, on account of the War. Good position he had in a Bank! Chucked it, as he said. Enlisted to go and have a pot at Geyser Bill——"

Five minutes later saw Miss Rosamond Fayre disposing her trunks as Mrs. Core's lodger, in a room whose windows looked above grey roofs and red chimney-pots out towards the towering shaft of the Cathedral.

"Hope you'll be comfortable here, Miss Fayre, I'm sure," said little Mrs. Core, bustling in with a jug of hot water. "You'll excuse the young gentleman having left up all his photos," with a nod towards framed portraits of Miss Lydia Kyasht, of Sam Langford, Lord Kitchener, Carpentier, and of a group of cricketers that hung upon the florally-papered walls. "His clothes I said he'd *got* to store. So there's heaps of room in here for your things. . . . This black serge," she touched Rosamond's skirt with a proprietary finger, "wears well, don't it? . . . M'm! Long time before any o' my clients come for any more pretty frocks *now*. As for such a thing as The Newest Paris Winter Fashions, Miss Fayre, it'll be a case of puzzle find 'em on most of us. All on account of this War! As

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far as the style of our clothes go," laughed the little dressmaker, "we shall be 'stuck so,' like they say to children making faces when the wind changes."

"What a good thing we're 'stuck' while frocks are so pretty, then," smiled Rosamond, slipping off her simple coat, "instead of being frozen into the fashions of gored skirts or leg-o'-mutton sleeves!"

"You're right," said Mrs. Core devoutly, unfolding a clean towel as she spoke. "By the way, I got a letter from that Miss Urquhart o' yours saying how pleased she was with the tussore coat. Old-fashioned little piece, isn't she? Frumpy, I'd call her. Doesn't pay for dressing. Most expensive materials she always goes in for, too. Very well off she'll be, of course. Well! I'm afraid you'll find this rather a change after living in that swagger Court, Miss Fayre——"

But as Rosamond Fayre glanced round the neat room, with its naively hideous decorations, at the resolute cheery face of her little landlady and at the smoke-grey glimpse of London outside, she shook her bright head with a quick smiling sigh of relief.

She felt that all she needed was exactly this—a thorough change from everything to do with Urquhart's Court; indeed, never again to see anything called Urquhart!

CHAPTER V

LONDON IN KHAKI

THE whole of the next day Rosamond Fayre spent in walking about a city that seemed to her oddly transformed from the London that she had known.

For this was the first time that she had been up to town since the outbreak of War.

It was a glorious morning ; the perfect harvest weather still unbroken. Overhead soft white mackerel clouds sailed over a sapphire sky ; the September sunshine bathed the pavements as Rosamond sped briskly along, turning first towards Victoria, and noting, with bright eyes, all that seemed so different.

The first thing that struck her was the number of people of every kind who thronged the streets. Every sort of person seemed to find it possible, these days, to take an hour or so " off " —at half-past eleven in the morning !—from Cityfied-looking men in top hats and morning-coats, to bands of tiny street-boys who paraded past in all the pomp and circumstance of uniforms made out of newspaper tied with string and with drums of biscuit-

LONDON IN KHAKI

boxes, shouting, "It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to gow!"

And in proportion to there being more people abroad, the horse and omnibus traffic was thinner. There were fewer omnibuses than taxis whisking past, each bearing the scarlet signal of that message, worded with varying degrees of urgency, "*Enlist for the War!*" "*Young Men of London, Join the Army Now!*" "*YOU are wanted TO-DAY!*"

Rosamond found herself wondering if it were her imagination or a fact that the faces of those who passed her wore a new expression; a look more alert, more alive and more determinate than that she had been accustomed to see on London faces in the time—now so far behind them all!—of Peace? That all-pervading type, the Flapper, seemed to be in abeyance—her place was taken by bonnie and resolute-faced young women, many wearing the badge of a Woman's Help Corps. Perhaps War smoothed out "types"—artistic freaks—by-products—resolving London's citizens into women and men?

Outside Victoria the traffic became a thickening throng. There was a stir and a running and a noise of cheering. But even tall Rosamond, hurrying towards that scene of interest, could not see much over the heads of the many who pressed between her and the Regiment marching into the station. Just a glimpse of lines of rifles above flat-topped caps, a glimpse of that stream of khaki

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dividing the darker crowds and flowing rhythmically past. . . .

"Off!" said someone near Rosamond to someone else in the crowd, and a voice answered with a note of desperate gaiety, "Ah, well, we shall see 'em turning up again with a bar or two to their medals, please God—(if that number's not *still* engaged by the Kaiser)——"

A hand seemed to grip at Rosamond's heart, a lump came into her throat so that she could only whisper below her breath, "Good luck to them!" It was pride for those who went, sorrow for those who might not return, and yet another feeling which was not yet quite clear to the girl herself.

She went on, past Westminster, Whitehall, Trafalgar Square, noticing the busy trade of the newspaper-sellers with their arresting posters—

"DESPERATE FIGHTING IN FRANCE!"

"France!" she thought, with a smile and a sigh. How little she, or any of those kindly village-folk in France had dreamt that fighting would desolate all that holiday place before the summer was over. She supposed that every man she'd ever seen there would be now with the French Army; from the Monsieur of the Hotel down to the polite black-eyed youth at the Débit Tabac, who had finished his military service, he'd told Rosamond,

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last year ; adding, " You have no military service in England, Mademoiselle ? It is droll, that."

Rosamond had even then considered that it was more than droll that the men of her country should jib at what these young Continentals took as a matter of course, namely, that every man should be trained to bear arms, and that drill and discipline were no hardship, but a privilege. Even before then she had always wondered why some sort of military training was not as universal among young Englishmen as, say, learning to swim ? There need be no " conscription " for that ?

Perhaps it was just the mere *words* " conscription " and " compulsory " to which people seemed to object ? Perhaps the actual sacrifice of a little personal liberty would find them ready enough ?

For now, at last, it seemed as if that spirit permeated All-London. . . .

At every turn she was met by the sight of that concealing and significant colour which is made up out of these three mingled ; the brown of earth-works, the green of trampled grass, the sandy-yellow of guarded coast. Drab and ugly enough in itself, yet now as glorious wear as is the richest red in the British Army, khaki was everywhere ; swinging down the streets, crowding the tops of omnibuses, filling private motor cars now labelled in staring letters, " O.H.M.S." Through the great windows of the Clubs, Rosamond caught glimpses of khaki, with here and there a splash of scarlet. " Staff "

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she supposed. And in Piccadilly she passed a not-to-be-forgotten group of three, standing at the corner by Stewart's. Two of them, very slim and young, were in uniform. These were talking eagerly to the third who stood between them. He was a mere lad; eighteen, nineteen? Small, younger than Cecil Bray, and of the type of youngster that instantly brings the thought, "How very lovely his sister must be!" He wore an ordinary blue lounge suit and a bowler, but there was that about him which marked him out as no uniform could have done. For his dainty, girlishly-featured, resolute little face was bronzed from weeks in glaring sunshine, and his right arm hung in a sling.

This child was a wounded officer, one of the very first of them, home from the Front. And as she passed up Bond Street—with the eyes of all three boys turned to follow her for a moment—Rosamond heard the youngest of them saying, "*Don't know, but as soon as I can get my ruffian of a doctor-man to let me go back, I——*"

So young, and so unperturbed! The sight of him made Rosamond Fayre realise what had been at the back of her mind all the time that she had been watching these signs of the times of England at War, with the best of her sons armed, or preparing to arm.

It was the thought of another young man whom she knew, and who was making no such preparation.

Ted Urquhart must be seven or eight years older

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than this youngster who was fuming to be sent back to face danger and what Rosamond thought must be worse, discomforts of the most sordid kind ; lack of the most elementary comfort, water, sleep ! Ted Urquhart, as far as physique went, was twice the man that this little officer-boy was.

Ted Urquhart—well, what was the use of thinking about him ? Fortunately—for no one likes to have to associate with “wasters” in time of War !—Fortunately, Rosamond would never see him again.

But everywhere she saw something to remind her of him and of how he'd failed. In every Bond Street shop window that showed field service equipment and uniforms and boots ; in the very posters of “England Expects—” and “Tommy Atkins” ; in the badges worn on so many civilian coats ; “O.B.C.”—“U.P.S.” ; in the trays of street-vendors who sold the French and English and Belgian colours instead of roses and carnations, “*Not flowers, but flags !*”—Why, it was London's motto now.

Yet Ted Urquhart, in white flannels, lounged and loitered among the hollyhocks and dahlias at Urquhart's Court.

She caught scraps of conversation from the people hurrying past her—and no one seemed to be speaking, except of War.

“Like to get hold of all those fellows who've been

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pooh-poohing for years the 'German Scare,' as they—— ”

“ And if we could have sent double the number of men at once, this affair would have been over in—— ”

“ A letter this morning ; ”—this was a woman's voice—“ no post-mark, of course ; and he mayn't let us know where they were, or what they were doing, but he sounded cheery and—— ”

—“ Says he met someone who actually *saw* them ! . . . two train-loads ! . . . noticed the odd uniform—— ”

—“ The very people who owe their fortunes to the fact that we've got an Army ! ”

“ Yes ! And who used to impress upon us that the Boy-Scout movement had absolutely nothing to do with ' any nonsense about being prepared for War, or Invasion.' But perhaps they'll know better—— ”

“ Ah, half the people in this country ought to go down on their knees to make a public apology to Lord Roberts ! ”

“ *Don't* you think five thousand recruits a day is enough ? ” This was from a lady who walked beside a white-moustached old soldier. And Rosamond, going by, with pricked-up ears, heard him answer : “ In what they call ' the families ' of England, there's not a man left to-day. Not a man.”

Not a man ? Only Ted Urquhart, of The Court !

As day wore on, more and more newspaper-

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sellers appeared in the streets, hawking the seventh and eighth "War-editions" with the flash of black letters across pink posters——

ALLIES GAIN GROUND

(OFFICIAL)

Among them little neatly-dressed French women with tricolour ribbons about their jackets and with straight fringes cut above their dark, anxious eyes, were offering "Le Cri de Londres". . . .

And then more people in the streets, more people. . . .

Rosamond Fayre, after one of those hybrid tea-shop meals dear to the heart of women, strolled back again towards Westminster, and through the archway into Dean's Yard, stopping at the echoing sound of words of command.

"'S' you wur! . . . 'Shun'! . . . By—your—
Left—T——"

There was a crowd at the railings. The railings themselves were hung everywhere with coats and Norfolk jackets and headgear of every sort; straw hats, bowlers, soft felt hats, caps. And beyond in the square beneath the plane trees, young men in white or coloured shirt-sleeves marched and formed fours and marked time.

"Recruits," a Special Constable with a striped armlet on his sleeve told Rosamond, "for the London

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Scottish. Framing splendidly, they are! Oh, yes, men drilling in all the Parks now, too. . ."

(—"Right-T—*whee*—ull!" and a steady rhythmic tramping of feet. . . .)

Rosamond Fayre stood watching the grand lads, the big company-officer who moved up and down before them.

And she thought, "*Not one of those looks any more like a soldier than Mr. Ted Urquhart, who isn't soldiering at all!*"

The September dusk fell over streets only half-lighted. Some lamps had covers on the top, some were ochred over. London looked odd without her electric signs, and with Piccadilly and Oxford Street all dim. Gone was that soft and golden glare, and the red haze in the sky! People's heads were lifted up to that slate-coloured sky, and Rosamond caught scraps of talk about the patrolling airship. Under the dim lights girls passed, with men in khaki beside them, khaki-sleeved arms about waists. And once again Rosamond Fayre found herself thinking of a young man *not* in khaki.

He was really not worth it! Not even worth wondering over!

Perhaps he thought that text held good for his case: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come"? He would be married to Eleanor in a few days—two days' time now.

Rosamond sighed as she walked homewards.

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This must be because she was very tired. She had been walking about all day, looking at things.

Of all these scenes that which was to remain with her longest was what she'd seen as she had passed Whitehall. In the wide road there had been a sudden scurrying forward of a crowd that seemed to spring up out of nowhere. On the tops of omnibuses passengers had stood up to look, had craned their necks to gaze after a figure in frock-coat and top-hat, who had just left a car, and was ascending the steps of the War Office. Small, white-haired, stately and indomitable, he was not to be mistaken.

His name had passed from mouth to mouth.

"See him? . . . It's him. . . . That's him. . . . Lord Roberts!"

Full of the picture, Rosamond's mind would link it for ever to the next sound that had struck upon her ears.

It had been that of a bugle; industriously practised by a lad in the park near by. Rosamond Fayre knew that bugle-call. She knew the words the soldier fits to it.

"I called them; I called them!"

They wouldn't come. They wouldn't come.

I called them——"

And amongst those who wouldn't answer, the case of Mr. Ted Urquhart seemed to her the most disgraceful.

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Perhaps it was rather odd that though she'd left The Court and the Urquharts behind her for ever, Rosamond should find herself thinking of him—them even more constantly than when she was among them.

This could only be because she had taken a really strong dislike to them.

She concluded that it must be that.

And so she went slowly home, through the darkened Buckingham Palace Road, to bed, hearing another bugle-call, the Last Post sounded from the near Barracks—and wondering where it would be heard by Cecil Bray . . . and by every other young man she'd seen who that day had done his duty.

CHAPTER VI

RECRUITING-RIBBONS

"THIS is all very well, but I can't go on like this as if I were 'a lady of leisure,'" thought Rosamond Fayre on the morning after that day which she'd spent walking about London. "I shall simply have to set about looking for some job."

But even as she made herself ready in her simple black jacket, her small black hat with the one pink velvet single rose, she realised that this was a time when people were losing their usual jobs rather than getting new ones. She would find it harder than ever to obtain work as a typist, a secretary, a cashier.

Once, when she had been first confronted with that problem of wage-earning, the tall supple girl had been asked if she would take a post as mannequin in a Wigmore Street *atelier*—"but now that would be 'off' too, I expect," thought Rosamond, as she walked along. "War does show up how utterly superfluous most single women's occupations are! What can I do?"

About one thing she made up her mind.

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She would *not* apply to the Red Cross Society, saying that she was ready to do "anything."

Rosamond realised how much valuable time of busy women was being taken up by just such applications.

She knew that womanly pity for wounded soldiers does not in itself constitute a "gift" for nursing; that excellence in housework and the constitution of a dray-horse are far more needful assets for a nurse. So, if she could not be of use in this capacity, at least she would not cumber the ground for those who could. . . .

But what else was there?

"I suppose I might try one of my old agencies," she thought as she sprang on to a 'bus in Victoria Street, "and at least put my name down for——"

Here the 'bus, giving a lurch, precipitated Rosamond on to the lap of another girl who was sitting on the front seat.

"So sorry," said Rosamond, stooping to pick up a sheaf of papers that the other girl had dropped. "I'm afraid one's blown over the side there——"

"It doesn't matter at all," the other girl reassured her with the friendly smile which stranger seemed to give stranger without reserve in those days. "Perhaps some young Johnny will pick it up and save me the trouble of having to thrust it into his hand. These are just recruiting pamphlets; I've hundreds of them left."

Rosamond, as the 'bus jogged along towards the

RECRUITING-RIBBONS

Abbey, regarded her with interest. She was dark-eyed and slender and pale with the clear pallor of the London indoor worker ; and she wore a bunch of red-white-and-blue ribbons pinned to the breast of her brown cloth jacket.

Rosamond asked her if she belonged to any sort of recognised Society.

" No ; oh, no. I'm just doing this on my own. There doesn't seem to be anything else to do. I lost my job (I was typist to a German Film Agency) the week War was declared," the girl said quite cheerfully, " and I don't seem to find another. No, I don't know what I shall do next ; but then, who does ? Who knows what's going to happen ? Only, I don't think any of us will be allowed to starve or turned out into the street for quite a bit," said the girl. " So I typed out a lot of these sort of tracts—some of them are extracts from Blatchford's things—and bits of Lord Roberts' speeches, and Kipling's verses and so on—and distribute them. I daresay the men read them ; anyhow, they don't tear them up while I'm there. So I hope they take them on into the public-houses—When I see men walking along, I *always* imagine they're just off to get a drink somewhere, don't you ?—and discuss them together. It does no harm. And it may keep them from forgetting what they ought to be doing, even if they aren't doing it ! "

" It's disgraceful if they aren't," said Rosamond, warmly. " Where do you go, to serve these out ? "

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"On Sundays I've been going up the River. Yes; there are rather a lot of men idling about there, still," said the recruiting-girl. "In flannels, punting, with Union Jack cushions and a girl in a pretty frock——"

"No self-respecting girl ought to allow herself to be seen about with such a 'man,'" protested Rosamond Fayre, but the other shrugged her slim, rather bent shoulders.

"All very well if all women could manage to think alike on just one subject for just one week. But they can't," she said philosophically. "Perhaps two or three of us might turn down a 'nut' who was slacking; but he knows only too well that for those three there'd be a dozen girls ready to leap at the chance of his taking them up the River. That's the whole trouble. I believe that there's nothing women couldn't do, *if there were only not quite enough of us to go round*. But—There are too many girls!"

Rosamond protested. "Not too many of the right kind! Those other girls would have to know that *they* were only taken when the best had turned their backs; they're only the second choice."

"They wouldn't mind. Some girls don't mind anything, as long as they get a fellow of their own," the ex-typist returned with bright acceptance of fact, "as long as they aren't left one of the million superfluous women—or is it three million?"

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"It seems to alter so," said Rosamond, "every time one hears the statistics."

"Well, statistics wouldn't matter to you. If there were five women to every man, you'd be the girl who got him," averred the other girl with a generously appraising glance. "May I ask if your own boy's at the Front?"

Rosamond coloured—for no earthly reason,—answering candour with candour. "He would be, if I'd got one, but I haven't."

"Now, isn't Life rum," said the other girl, reflectively. "Teeth like that, and not a nut to crack with 'em. Well, well! Here's where I get off," she added, as the 'bus jolted to a standstill beside the pavement near Whitehall. "Good luck and good-bye—unless you'd like to come and help me to distribute my tracts——"

Rosamond Fayre answered almost before she knew what she had decided to say.

"Yes! Why not?" she said, rising and following the other girl down the steps of the 'bus. "I'll come with you if you'd like me to——"

"Good!" said the recruiting-girl. And as they reached the entrance to the Horse Guards she divided her sheaf of pamphlets, giving half to Rosamond. Together they passed the mounted Lifeguardsmen at the entrance to the Horse Guards; they walked through the shadow of the arches under the clock and out into the sunny spaces with the tall grey Admiralty buildings to

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the right of them, the recruiting-tents to the left, the green trees of the Park, mellowing now to brown, facing them as they stood, blinking for a moment after the shadow.

On the wall of a shed near by a knickerbockered lad in a wide hat and a grey flannel shirt stiff with badges, stood pasting up notices with the air of one firmly convinced that the safety of an Empire rests upon his efficiency. He was, of course, a Boy Scout.

Rosamond's companion turned towards him.

"I say, sonny, let's have one of your posters," she begged. "One of those about 'Why Britain is at War.'"

"Can't spare one, Miss," he said, scarcely turning his bright eyes from his work. "They'll give you some if you apply at that tent over there," he pointed with his paste-brush. Then, drawing up his small sturdy figure, this twelve-year-old added with all the authority of a full General, "Tell them a SCOUT sent you."

Five minutes later the recruiting-girl had fastened one of these posters to her jacket, sandwich-man-fashion, and had pinned her own bunch of red-white-and-blue ribbons to the breast of Rosamond's coat.

"We'll stand here by the entrance," she said to Rosamond. "Always a heap of men here, passing at their dinner-hour, or hanging about to see people

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coming through from the War Office. Think they'll get a glimpse of 'K.' p'raps. Give one to everybody ; I'll take the ones on the left."

The groups of people formed, broke up, re-formed and passed. And now Rosamond wondered—not that so many young men were drilling and in uniform, but that there still remained so many in civilian get-up. She chose to watch the next six who passed her and who took her pamphlet civilly enough, wondering what kept them as they were, summing them up in her rapid, perhaps inaccurate feminine fashion. From among the women, the work-girls, the old or middle-aged men who walked in the midday sunshine of the park, she picked out what seemed to her the potential recruits.

Here was the first. "*One.*"—A young fellow of twenty-two or three, perhaps ; black coat, shop-assistant class. Pale, slenderly-built, but healthy-looking. . . . Six months, a year's soldiering would make as good a man of him as that sentry, pink-cheeked and stalwart and gorgeous in his long black boots and white buckskin breeches, whose sword gleamed to the salute as a tall officer swung by, with a rainbow-coloured line of ribbon across his breast.

"*He* could enlist," decreed Rosamond, as the young fellow took the pamphlet, with a clearly rueful glance.

"You never know," returned the other recruiting-girl. "Might have an invalid mother who'd nobody

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but that to support her. He might *want* to go all right, but it's not all honey for the soldier's dependants, so——"

"*Two*" went by; a small, alert Cockney, red-neckkerchiefed coster type, bright-eyed, sharp-featured.

"Undersized, I suppose," thought Rosamond, glancing down at the narrow chest of the little fellow who took her pamphlet with a cheerful—

"Ah, I'm too big to send against those pore Germans; must give 'em fair play, Lady!"

"Plenty of the French Tommies looked smaller," thought Rosamond.

"*Three*" passed with "*Four*"; men of twenty-eight to thirty-three, say. Soft green felt hats, much gesture as they talked, bold black glances—Jews! They were probably making money still, even out of this War. A little, theatrical-looking lady, daintily-dressed, walked between them with a clash of gold trinkets, leaving a whiff of perfume on the fresh breeze.

Rosamond's companion gave a philosophic sniff.

"*Number Five*" went by; a rather well-made, rather well-dressed youth of twenty, with "colours" in his tie. He was hatless. A horse-chestnut was not more polished than his smooth head and the boots that matched it. He took the bill that Rosamond offered—it was headed by a verse entitled "The Shirker." He gave a glance at it, at her; and then stopped. The expression on his not

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uncomely face was distinctly peevish, so was the tone of his voice as he addressed Miss Fayre.

"I say! Look here! I'm getting abso-lutely *fed* with this!" he exclaimed crossly. "*All* you girls keep *on* asking a fellow why he isn't at the Front——"

Rosamond's blue eyes echoed this query.

"Well! A fellow's done his best, don't you know!" he told her, still in that exasperated tone. "Twice I've applied to those guys at the War Office, besides writing and writing to those Territorial Johnnies. They don't seem—ah—to *want* a fellow. I'm keen enough to fight, or to do anything. But they don't seem to have another blessed commission to *give* a fellow——"

"Oh, a commission—but why wait for that?" asked Rosamond Fayre. "Why not join Lord Kitchener's Army?"

"Me?" barked the auburn-haired youth.

"Yes! why not? You're 'between nineteen and thirty-five,' I expect?" suggested the fair girl, quite gently. One or two elderly men paused to regard the little scene; a nurse with a Red Cross on her coat, and holding a white-jerseyed two-year-old by the hand, listened smiling as Rosamond added, "You're 'physically fit,' aren't you?"

"*Ra*-ther! Of course a fellow's physically fit! When he can break records—ah—for swimming the——"

"Splendid," said Rosamond, soothingly. "Then

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since you want to get out to the Front, why don't you enlist?"

"As a common soldier?" took up this patriot, disgustedly. "Oh, dash it—look here, you know! A fellow's a gentleman—ah—by birth and education——"

"Yes! That is exactly how I should have described you," said Rosamond, finding it a little difficult to speak as evenly as she would have wished.

"Well, then, you *see!*" took up the auburn-haired youth. "A fellow can't mix with all the tag-rag and bobtail of the slums, what? Hang it all! Fellow doesn't want to have to sleep fourteen in a tent, or whatever it is, with beastly unwashed Tommies!"

Rosamond could only glance at her companion. The other hardier girl came forward briskly.

"'Unwashed'?" she echoed. "Wouldn't you rather have unwashed Englishmen than the other kind spreading themselves all over the Horse Guards here? Germans don't go in for too many baths, I can tell you; I know, because I've worked for 'em in an office that wasn't one bit fresher than one of those tents you're shying at. As for you, you'd be as unwashed as our Tommies yourself at this minute if you were doing your duty. Aren't you afraid you're a bit of a snob?"

"I'm afraid," said the young man rebukefully, "that you're just *suffragettes!*"

"I never *was!* I'm engaged to an unwashed

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Territorial, thank you ! And anyhow there isn't such a thing as a suffragette left nowadays. You are behind the times. Good-bye ! " the recruiting-girl dismissed him with a little nod and the quotation—

*" ' For we don't want to lose you
But we think you ought to go ! ' "*

The auburn-haired Exquisite went ; muttering something about what a fellow had to put up with, just because those blighters at the War Office——

Rosamond laughed, with the other girl. The Nurse, the tiny boy who was all eyes for the sentry's cuirass, and the old gentlemen passed on towards the Mall. A knot of working-girls—probably members of Eleanor's Club—went by chattering, arm-in-arm, into Whitehall. There was a little pause before any young man came along to be classified as " Number Six."

Rosamond took another handful of bills from her companion ; she was smiling, speaking to her when, from the direction of Wellington Square, that Sixth young man walked by.

Rosamond, talking to the other girl, had not noticed him as he strode past. He halted abruptly ; turned back, faced that tall, fair girl in black, with the bunch of recruiting-ribbons fluttering above her breast. The shadow of his arm as he lifted his hat fell across her sheaf of papers.

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Rosamond Fayre's eyes turned from her companion to confront the second tall and stalwart young civilian who had that morning stopped before her.

And then an odd thing happened ; a thing bewildering but swiftly gone as the sudden flash in the sun of a heliograph message.

For at the sight of this sixth young man Rosamond Fayre almost uttered a little " oh—" and she knew herself to be colouring hotly. She had felt for the second time in her life, that indescribable and sudden thrill of delight ; warm and young and not-to-be-denied. The first time had been at Eleanor's Hen-party, when Mr. Ted Urquhart had asked Eleanor's secretary for that waltz (which she had refused).

This second time it was at the mere unexpected sight of Mr. Ted Urquhart here in London.

Then in a flash it had gone, and she knew that she must have been dreaming to imagine that it had ever been.

She glanced unsmilingly up at Eleanor's dear Ted ; he was still wearing that grey suit ; still determined that he'd be damned if he'd go to the War.

" How do you do, Miss Fayre ? " he said.

For a second Rosamond wondered which would

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best convey her disapproval of a young man of this calibre ; silence or speech ? Then she said, " Good-morning," allowing her gaze to wander to the Wireless masts above the Admiralty buildings which she could observe beyond Mr. Ted Urquhart's shoulder.

He stood there—as if he had anything to say ! As he stood, half-a-dozen working-men in corduroys came up and held out horny hands for papers from these girls, pressing about them. Rosamond proffered no recruiting-pamphlet to Mr. Ted Urquhart. She felt that she need not take of him even as much notice as she had bestowed upon the other shirker, the gentleman (by birth and education) who could not enlist. She was not any longer at that Court—of his.

And still Eleanor's dear Ted waited. He spoke, rather stiffly. " Have you—any message for down there ? Could I do anything—for you——? "

" Oh, I don't think so," answered Miss Fayre in cool surprise, " thanks."

She turned from him, making it her business to hand a pamphlet of each sort in her sheaf to the nearest passer-by ; needlessly enough ! since this chanced to be an officer in Naval uniform, who thanked her with much grace, much play of the reprobate and sea-blue eye under the peak of his white cap.

And when, having uttered a hasty " Pass them on, please ! " she turned again, Mr. Ted Urquhart

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had taken himself off ; he had disappeared through the arches and across the courtyard into Whitehall. That way lay the War Office—with which, of course, Mr. Ted Urquhart had no business.

And Rosamond had absolutely no business (as she seemed to be continually reminding herself) with Mr. Ted Urquhart. Why need *she* feel sore and ashamed about his defection? That was for Eleanor to feel—fortunately Eleanor, being a Pacifist, didn't feel it. What difference could it have made to Rosamond if she'd heard that Mr. Ted Urquhart had volunteered as soon as War broke out? Ah, yes! it would have made a difference! That is, she would have felt then that all the men were standing together. Now she knew that one was holding back. And it had "rubbed it in" so to have lived for all those weeks in the same house with him.

Well, she'd left now!

She'd have to make herself forget it.

She was sorry that here, in the midst of such different surroundings, she had been reminded of it all again.

She wished she'd never seen him. . . .

That is, she wished she hadn't seen him just now. . . .

"I say, my dear——"

Rosamond came back with a start to her surroundings, and to the other girl who touched her arm, and went on. "I've got rid of all mine now,

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and it's nearly two. (What about five-pennyworth of something to eat in an A.B.C. ? Come along.) If we haven't sent any of them to the Front, we've shown them what they're thought of at the Back. What price Gilbert the Filbert, eh ? And *weren't* you crushing to your tall friend in grey ! "

" He wasn't a friend," Rosamond assured her hastily, as the two walked up to the Strand together. " He was merely a man I met while I was working for the girl he's engaged to."

" *Engaged*, is he ? " said the London girl, with an odd, quick glance.

Rosamond said : " He's to be married to-morrow."

And that thought, which had even less to do with her than the thought of Mr. Ted Urquhart generally, recurred to her again and again. Even while she sat in the tea-shop, sharing with that other girl a meal composed of a cup of Bovril, a soup-plateful of peaches-and-cream—even when she said good-bye to this new friend, made another appointment with her, and turned towards that Agency where she must put down her application—even while she walked back along Oxford Street noting the "*Business As Usual*" signs, and the inevitable bright be-flagged war-maps, those war-telegrams in every shop window—even while, back in her Ebury Street room, she took down her heavy hair to brush out the London dust, she found herself ridiculously unable to keep that irrelevant memory out of her mind.

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Mr. Ted Urquhart and Eleanor were to be married to-morrow !

Very quietly, in that little village Church with the grey spire like a pepper-castor peering above the dull green cliff of elm. . . . They'd all motor there together, Rosamond supposed ; thinking of them all in a series of pictures clear and distinct to her mind as any thrown upon a cinema-screen. There'd be old Mr. Urquhart, with his grey elf-locks and his Tennysonian hat, full of allusions to the " Dame Eleanors " and the " Mistress Edward Urquharts " who had been brides in the course of the last five centuries ; there'd be Eleanor with that dream of a Limerick lace veil softening the matter-of-fact, conscientious little face, standing rather stiffly before the altar, with perhaps a splash of jewelled colour—purple, scarlet, orange—flung from the panes of the old stained-glass window upon her white wedding-dress. Repeating, in that trite young voice that had dictated so many business-letters, "*I, Eleanor, take thee, Edward Clive—*" And Edward Clive—Eleanor's dear Ted ? He would be towering by a head and shoulders above the small compact figure of the bride : with that inscrutable sunburnt face of his giving away as little as usual of what he was feeling at the moment. He'd be wearing the morning-coat, the conventional grey trousers of the bridegroom—

" Odious rig ! " thought Rosamond Fayre. " No wonder a man always looks his very worst at his

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wedding, unless he elects to get married in uniform ! ”

But there'd be no question of uniform at Urquhart's Court.

There was the question of the vow to “obey,” though.

Rosamond remembered that the name of Eleanor Urquhart had been signed to more than one petition for the disuse of this obsolete absurdity.

“As if it mattered whether a woman *said* it, or *meant* it, or *what*. If she was marrying a real man, he'd make her *want* to,” thought this retrograde Rosamond, brushing her shining mane out before the ex-bank-clerk's small mirror.

The echo of other scraps of that service drifted through her golden head. She'd heard many brides-to-be discussing it as “unnecessary,” and “horrid,” and “awful.” But to her it seemed that so much of it was stately, beautiful. “To have and to hold . . . till death us do part.” Could that be bettered ? Softly Rosamond repeated it to herself. And then, “With my body I thee worship.” What poet had ever put into the mouth of a lover such a line as this that the bridegroom must be saying to-morrow ?

Here, abruptly, Rosamond turned to answer a tap at the door.

“Brought you up a nice hot cup o' tea, Miss Fayre,” announced her little landlady, entering. “I'll put it down on the chest-o'-drawers here.

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Dear me, what hair you have, to be sure. Never saw anything like it. Seems a pity there's nobody but other girls allowed a look at it all down like that. Got a bit of a headache have you ? "

" No ! Thank you very much," said Rosamond. " I haven't a headache. But I'd love a cup of tea, Mrs. Core. Nothing to eat, thank you."

" Thought you seemed a bit quiet when you came in ? " suggested Mrs. Core with that quick glance and void of illusion which she had in common with the little typist of the German cinema-agency and the Horse Guards Parade. " No ! P'raps it's only natural we should all feel quieter these days, Miss Fayre. I'll take the cup down presently."

Even as Rosamond, with her hair streaming over her blue crêpe kimona, sat on the edge of the " camp-bed " that Mrs. Core's last lodger had left for a more comfortless Camp—even as she sipped the welcome tea, the girl's thoughts flew back once more to that tormenting—no, that irrelevant subject of the Urquhart wedding to-morrow.

This time to-morrow Eleanor and her dear Ted would be having tea together for the first time as a married couple ! Rosamond wondered where it would be. In the train, probably, going off somewhere. . . . Rosamond wondered how Eleanor was feeling about it all.

Probably just the same as usual ! Probably not in the least agitated or excited or suffering from any symptom of the malady that Miss Fayre had

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heard described as "*Bridal Fluster!*" Probably putting aside all thought of to-morrow's event while she busied herself with what seemed of equal importance—to-day's meeting at The Court for the Reservists' Wives!

"I daresay it was because of the meeting that her dear Ted was packed off up to Town this morning," reflected Rosamond as she set down her empty cup. "Or perhaps he came up—it's a thing a man's supposed to leave to the last minute!—to buy the wedding-ring?"

Her ringless, pretty hands went up to her hair again, dividing, before she coiled into the heavy knot, that warmed and scented shawl of gold. "A pity," the little landlady had said, "that no one but other girls were allowed to see it!"

With a curious little stab of—what must be resentment, *since pain and longing it could not be*—Rosamond remembered that once she had been seen with all the glory of her hair tumbling about her, far below her waist, by a man. By the man who had run up to her help that morning on the sea-shore in France—the man who had then scraped acquaintance with her, without saying who he was—the man who was Eleanor's property—the man who had turned out to be a shirker and a coward—the man who had surprised Rosamond into that first mad moment of throb and thrill, before she'd snubbed him on the Horse Guards Parade. . . .

"Anyhow, that's the last glimpse I shall ever

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have of *him*, I hope," concluded Rosamond Fayre, stabbing her largest tortoise-shell pin very firmly through the Clytie knot. "And I'm glad that the last glimpse he had of *me* was that I turned my back on him."

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CHAPTER VII

THE RESERVIST'S WIFE

WHILE Rosamond Fayre, with recruiting-ribbons at her breast, had been surrounded by men on the sunlit Parade, Miss Eleanor Urquhart had been preparing for another Hen-party at Urquhart's Court.

Very different, this one, from the gay gathering of Club girls that had been scattered like a giantess's piece-box of many colours over the great green billiard-table of a lawn, that afternoon not many weeks ago !

For this party did not fill the whole lawn, but only a few garden benches that were set out under the lime-trees that had already shed a light carpet of dead leaves which would have been beheld with horror by Mr. Marrow—on a far corner of that lawn.

Eleanor, the chairwoman of that meeting, standing by a table that was put to face the rows of seated women, wore the "responsible"-looking grey costume that she had worn on the other occasion. Her friend, Miss Fabian, who, all pince-nez and superiority, was to address the meeting, wore under

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her cape of Art-green cloth with the collar of Vorticist embroidery, the same brown-patterned Liberty gown ; but the dress of the Reservists' wives was soberer and in many cases shabbier than the pink and Saxe and sky-blue bravery that had adorned the party of Eleanor's Club girls. Those girls had chattered and giggled and shrieked aloud in the high tide of exuberant spirits, but there was little laughter or noise among these women. The Club girls had sung musical-comedy choruses, and had played kissing-games and had waltzed to the music of the blue-and-white uniformed band ; but here was no singing, no dancing ; and, in the now historic phrase, "*this was not the time to play games.*" These wives of men who had rejoined their old regiments were of varying ages and varying classes, from a bonneted and shawled flower-seller to a retired lady's maid, in a hat and a black frock that had been made (originally) in Vienna ; but upon the faces of nearly all of them there was to be seen the levelling look of strain, of responsibility. For at such a time "*women must weep*" is not the motto for such as they, but "*women must work.*"

To find reasonably-paid work for each of these left-behinds was now Eleanor's care. In the large book before her on the table there was entered—in the pretty, clear handwriting that was so successfully modelled on the writing of her late secretary—a suggestion for employment opposite each name that she had just taken down.

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" And now, before we all go into the dining-room for tea," she concluded, " my friend, Miss Octavia Fabian, will say a few words to us explaining why our country is at War, and what we hope the results of this War will be."

Miss Fabian rose, and the decorous silence in the ranks of the Reservists' wives became troubled by gusts of whispering here and there that made a background for the high-pitched, clear-cut tones of Miss Fabian's platform voice.

" Now, what I have to Explain to you wives of our soldiahs—— "

" —Six of 'em, and always kept as anyone could see them ! When I took them to the Institute the Matron said, ' Well, if all the children we had brought here was as—— "

" Same battery as my old—— "

" Rent ? I says, whatever's '*rent*,' I should like to know—— "

" Ah, she's one o' the lucky ones ; never bin so well off in her life. He used to drink every penny she made, and now what's she got ? Separation allowance *and* half-pay from his firm, if you please ; bought herself a new 'at, new boots. All she's got to do now is walk out in 'em and get off again ! "

" Order, please ! Hush ! " from Miss Urquhart.

Then, louder from the speaker in the green cape, " We intend that aft-ah this deplorable War, there can be No furth-ah War. We are fighting for that Great Aim. We are fighting (paradoxically

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enough!) for Disarmament! We are fighting so that our children and our children's children need Nev-ah know what fighting Is—— ”

“—soon as he read that piece in the *Mirror* about that charge of his old Rigiment he says to me ‘ Good-bye, Annie,’ he says, ‘ I’m off. Don’t care if my time is up,’ he says, ‘ I’m goin’ to rejoin, if they’ll ‘ave me.’ And o’ course they—— ”

“ Will you all p-p-please be quiet until Miss Fabian has finished,” interposed the chairman once more. Then she turned, to find, waiting at her elbow, the tall young parlourmaid in blue with silver buttons, who had replaced Mr. Beeton the butler (now Petty Officer Beetles).

“ What is it, White ? ” murmured her mistress. “ I said—— ”

“ If you please, Miss, a young—a young Person has just arrived who says she must see Miss Urquhart at once,” whispered the parlourmaid, conveying all her scandalised disapproval of this intruder in one sedate glance. “ I said you were engaged, Miss, but the—the Person said it was important and she must see you yourself, at once. She didn’t give any name.”

“ Is she a Reservist’s wife ? ” murmured Miss Urquhart ; upon which the sedate White replied, “ I shouldn’t imagine so, Miss, but she has a little baby with her.”

“ Perhaps I’d better come,” said Eleanor. With an apologetic glance at the back view of Miss

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Fabian's Art-green cape, she slipped away from the meeting under the limes, and walked across the lawn beside the parlourmaid.

"Where is she—in the Hall?"

"Oh no, Miss; she didn't want to come into the house, she said. And when she heard you'd got a meeting, she wouldn't come on to the Terrace. She said she wanted to speak to you by yourself, and she'd wait at the back. She gave the little baby to Mrs. Marrow to hold, Miss, and she went towards the kitchen-garden; walking up and down; I wondered if perhaps she weren't quite right in her head; she looked quite wild, somehow——"

"Poor thing, what can it be?" said Miss Urquhart wonderingly, and she sped towards the walled kitchen-garden at the back of the Court.

She opened the green door which pushed softly against the great dark cushion of the rosemary bush that grew beside the wall. The rest of that brick wall of mellow-red and yellow was a backing for great spreading fans of plum and apricot. Half a dozen forcing frames were ranged in between it and the thick box border that edged the path. And on the path, between those frames and the prickly ranks of the gooseberry bushes in the opposite bed, she beheld, striding away from the door, the buxom figure of a young woman clad in a skirt of large black-and-white check, and a belted frieze sports-coat of a most brilliant and arresting pink; the colour of the brightest rhododendron, the most

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garishly gay petunia. Her hands were thrust down into the pockets of this garment ; her head, a lurid crimson casque of a hat, was held defiantly erect.

As the door opened to admit Miss Urquhart, the girl in the flaring pink coat wheeled round and turned her comely, excited face upon her.

"Pansy ! It's you ?" cried Eleanor astonished.

Then, as she came forward to meet the Principal Boy, that astounded look faded from Miss Urquhart's small face, leaving it disapproving beyond description ; searching, hard.

For Pansy Vansittart was the very last visitor whom Eleanor had expected or wished to see, since enquiries that she had lately been making about her seemed likely to be true.

There was a cloud of the blackest suspicion over Pansy's good name.

A rumour of it had reached Urquhart's Court as long ago as the day of the Girls' Garden Party, when Miss Fabian had mentioned that friend of hers who collected rents, and who knew "*something to the discredit*" of Miss Urquhart's theatrical *protégée*. . . . That friend, who had been away, had returned and had furnished Miss Fabian with further particulars of what she knew. Miss Fabian had only to-day passed them on to the Head of the Girls' Holiday Hostel Club.

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No wonder Miss Urquhart scarcely expected to see this girl before her, here !

In her austerest voice she began, " Well, Pansy. I am surprised. Have you anything to say to me—— "

" I have, Miss Urquhart. I should think I had. Several things ! " cut in the Principal Boy in her loudest and least abashed tone. She stood there, her feet in their showily-buckled shoes planted well apart on that path ; her handsome head well up, her face pale beneath its inevitable powder, and her brown eyes ablaze with temper. " I want to know, for a start, if you aren't *ashamed* of yourself ? "

Eleanor, rooted to the spot beside the rosemary bush, was for a moment struck dumb by this unlooked-for opening. It was one which she thought might have been more suitably turned upon Miss Vansittart herself. But there was no trace of shame or even nervousness in that young woman's wrathful gaze as she glared down upon the Court's young mistress and, without waiting for any answer, went on with her indictment :

" Nosing and busybodying into my affairs, you've bin ! Writing letters ! Sending to my old address ! Setting the landlady on to Mag about my concerns ! It's not what any *lady* would do, that's flat ! "

Eleanor, with a very stiff backbone, interposed :
" I think you are forgetting yourself—— "

" What ? " (Staccato.) " Me ? Haw ! " (Still

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more staccato.) "Tell me who started it—that's what I'd like to know! That's what I'd like to know! Who sent that little freak of an Autumn Daisy pokin' round my place and wantin' to know everything from the hot water pipes down to what time everybody came in at night, the——"

She paused. No epithet to be found even in Pansy's vocabulary could have conveyed the withering scorn of that short pause.

She went on again. "I know who it was, as a matter of fact. Ho, yes! It was that Miss Four-eyes Fabian of yours! She's the one! *She's* one o' those spiteful cats who's never happy unless she's raking up anything she can against any girl who happens to be good-looking; she hasn't got any chance of a young man of her own, no, and she'll see that nobody else has, too, without she can make things hot for her! Rakin' up and snuffin' out, the——"

Here another of those brief but pregnant pauses, while Eleanor, flushed and angry, would have spoken. Pansy's "Huh!" cut like a pistol-shot across any attempt at interruption. The warm quiet of that sunny garden fled; walls and bushes and frames and vegetable-beds seemed to ring, to echo again with the storming of that young woman with that voice, those garish garments.

"Taking away a girl's reputation. Thinks nothing o' that, she don't! . . . A respectable girl! Girl that's always been being *got* at, as a matter of

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fact, for being so particular and strait-laced ! Starting a pack of lies about her, and people jorin'—— ! ”

“ Do you mean that this is not true ? ” Eleanor slipped in hastily and edgewise. “ This that Miss Fabian's friend—— ”

“ There ! A-har ! Didn't I know it—— ”

“ —that Miss Fabian's friend told me was known for a fact ? She said that when she called at your rooms at that place in Brixton,” persisted Miss Urquhart, “ that she actually saw you, and that you did not deny—— ”

“ 'Course I didn't deny anything ! Deny ? What's the good of denying anything to a little flannel-face with a voice like an ungreased wheel that came pokin' round with her, ' Are you Miss Vansittart ? ' ' Guilty ! ' I said ; and me that hadn't had time to get dressed, with me hair all down and my pink matinée on. ' Come in, do. This way ! I'd better put you on the Free List,' I said, and pretty satirically, too, *which* she didn't take in. ' Have a good look round, old dear.' Which she did. Hoo ! I couldn't help seein' the funny side,” enlarged Pansy indignantly, “ when me Aunt Geranium began putting her eyes on stalks to gape round my place at all Ma's furniture ”—a gasp for breath here—“ and the big gramophone in the corner and the siphons and the ash-trays ” (gasp) “ and my photographs of the other girls and the comedian in our Company and some of the little

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things drying on the fire-guard" (pant) "and *The London Mail*! It amused me!" declared Pansy with another angry hoot. "And when she said to me, 'I hear some of the tenants are complainin' because you never came in till midnight'" (gasp). "'Midnight if I'm lucky,' I said. 'It's oftener one and two, G.M.!' She said, 'Very unpleasant for a young woman to walk down this lonely new road alone, so late?' I said, 'Must be! I generally take good care to have a young man, to hang on to, with *me*!' And she" (gasp) "looked all ways for daylight and said, 'No, really. Do you really mean to admit that you return every night at those disgraceful hours and with a MAN?' and I" (gasp) "just said the nastiest thing I could think of."

Here Pansy, with another hoot, tossed her crimson casque and laughed into Eleanor's apprehensive little face as she concluded with that "nastiest thing" she had hurled at the rent (and scandal) collecting spinster.

"I said, 'Yes; *Miss*!'"

"W-w-w-well, then, I d-d-don't see how you can d-d-d-*defend* your conduct," took up Eleanor, with an energetic though stammering attempt to regain her legitimate footing. "And b-b-besides that, there is another thing. The m-m-maid told me j-just now that you b-b-brought a b-b-baby with you, and that the g-gardener's wife is minding it for you now. Is it your s-sister's child?"

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"No fear!" retorted Pansy promptly. "Let my sister cart her own little handfuls about! It's mine, that is."

"Yours?" said Eleanor, with a deepening of the hardness on her face. "Then it was all true. You *have* got a baby——"

"Why shouldn't I?" snapped the Principal Boy.

"A baby——"

"Yes. Why not? Haven't I been married gettin' on for two years now——"

"Married?" echoed the stupefied Eleanor.

"You're *married*?"

The breast of Pansy's petunia-pink frieze coat seemed to swell as a sail that takes the breeze. With another toss of her whole person she retorted, "You don't give me much chance, do you, Miss Urquhart? You don't take much for granted! As soon as you've made sure there's a kid, you—ah, you're as bad as the other one!" Her face, no longer pale, deepened in colour almost to the crimson of her hat. "If you don't believe me, Miss Urquhart, you'd better look at *these*——"

She plunged her hand into one of the hip-pockets of her coat, drew out a long packet of papers and thrust them upon the younger girl.

"Here's my marriage-lines, see? Read 'em," she commanded. "Yes, you read 'em; here you are. 'Pansy Teresa Price,' understand? That's me. Vansittart's only my stage name, as any o' the girls could have told you, if you'd gone about

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asking them in the right way," snorted the Principal Boy. "And here's my other name, Hawkins!" She stabbed the certificate with a nicotine-gilded forefinger. "Here *he* is: 'George Herbert Stanley Hawkins'—that's the 'young man' I used to come home with every night at those 'disgraceful hours'—yes, and stay home with, too. (More than some o' them do!) Think o' that! That's my Stanley! That's my husband! 'Cinematograph Operator'; that's his occupation. Was then, I mean. Want to know what his present shop is? What he's doin' now, Miss Urquhart? He"—with another proud heave of that petunia-pink bosom—"he's reelin' off another sort o' pictures"—with a brisk circular gesture—"of those heathen Germans! Yes. He's working a machine-gun somewhere in France at this minute, bless 'im! That's where he is; with his old battery that he served with in the Bor' War! That's right. Well! And so you'd a party for Reservists' Wives here to-day, Miss Urquhart. Pity you never thought to give *me* a call!"

"How w-w-was I to know that you were a Reservist's wife?" demanded the discomfited Eleanor, not unnaturally rather cross. "How c-c-could anyone have thought you w-were a m-married woman?"

At this Pansy's temper, that seemed for the minute abating, suddenly flared up again. She kicked the path with the wooden Louis heel of her shoe as she exclaimed, "Not 'a married woman!'

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Me! A married woman, ah, and a good wife—*which is more than you'll ever be*, Miss Urquhart, for all those sparklers on your finger there and for all this swanky house-and-grounds that you're getting married for!"

"There is no n-n-n-need," Eleanor began, set-faced, "to be insolent, Pansy."

"Insolent? Shall be insolent if I like—I shall say what I like to you for once, Miss Urquhart, and do you good," cried the Principal Boy, her bell-like tones shaking afresh with anger. "Don't think I don't see through you—a nice kind of sweetheart you'd make to any man—let alone the one who's the misfortune to be cast for your intended! I bet that's never been anything but a dead frost since the curtain went up on it! I bet he's never been encouraged to catch *you* in his arms and fairly eat *you* up with kisses, same as a girl's got to expect when she's promised herself to a fellow!"

Here, Eleanor Urquhart, standing there small and undefensive, winced. She winced distinctly. She put out the spare brown hand that wore the Urquhart ring, and gave a little clutch, as if for support, to the rosemary bush beside her. She held on to a bunch of the sturdy twigs, thick with dark, aromatic leaves. Her other hand went to the breast of her grey jacket and she cleared her throat with a little choking sound that was rather pathetic. But she did not move the relentless Principal Boy. Pansy,

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who had lashed herself up into growing excitement, went on.

" Ah, you look down on me, Miss Urquhart. You think I'm ' not a lady,' but I tell you what it is— I know you're not a woman! Ah, and he knows it too, your Mr. Urquhart does. A pretty wash-out that'll be, you getting tied up to him! For"— Pansy wound up with a piece of tried feminine philosophy—" *if you can't keep a young man before you've got him, when can you, I should like to know?* "

Here Eleanor, still clutching the rosemary twigs suddenly raised the dusky head which had dropped on to her slight chest. Blankly, incredulously, her dark eyes met the angry, taunting eyes of the woman of whom she'd thoroughly "got the back up."

" Pansy! " she exclaimed, " I d-don't understand. I w-w-want to know what you m-mean by what you've just said. ' Not k-keep him ' ? "

" Oh, you know you haven't! You know you haven't! " Pansy persisted, roused, angry, the worst in her nature awake and anxious to hurt the fellow-woman to whom she had always been sub-consciously antagonistic. " Anyone could see with half an eye who all *his* eyes were for! If I'd only seen him at the Party here, I should have been on to it, watching him follow her about like—why, like the limelight follows the leading lady round the stage in her big scene! You weren't on in that, Miss Urquhart! Let alone that time in France, at the Hostel——"

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"What was that?" Eleanor, her eyes fixed on the Principal Boy, demanded, very sharply. "What was that at the Hostel?"

"Only the same thing—only more so. He was her shadow, was your handsome young man. He couldn't help himself!" enlarged the Principal Boy. "He was hers for a word, for a look——"

"Who d'you mean? Tell me. You must tell me," said Eleanor Urquhart, peremptorily, with a sharp, shrill note in her voice that sounded odd in her own ears. "I have a right to know."

"You're a fool if you don't know already," retorted the downright pantomime-girl. "I mean her you left to look after us there; Miss Fayre. D'you suppose that good-looking young fellow wasn't head over ears in love at first sight with that peach of a girl?"

There was a silence in that sunny garden; through which floated from the house the deep and distant purr of the gong for tea. Then Eleanor, still with that odd new note in her voice, said, "This must be a mistake."

Pansy laughed unsympathetically.

"A mistake? Not of mine, Miss Urquhart. Why, you should have seen him! Every time he gave her a look, well, it might as well have been a arm round and have done with it! And didn't he let out to me himself that he'd been chasing round the rocks and everywhere that morning trying to find Miss Fayre? Didn't he get me to get the other

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girls out of the way that afternoon so that he should have the stage to himself to talk to her? Not that I heard a word after," the Principal Boy added, "turned him down proper, I shouldn't wonder. Got a best boy of her own, has our Miss Fayre, I expect. But if there wasn't any poaching on your preserves that week, it wasn't any credit to your young Mr. Ted!"

"Are you sure?" began Eleanor, a little gaspingly. "Pansy! Are you——"

But her small and agitated voice was interrupted by a volume of sound that came from beyond the closed green door of the garden; a noise as of a young and healthy bull-calf, bellowing.

The door behind Eleanor was pushed open and the noise increased almost deafeningly as there appeared the aproned, rosy and plump wife of Mr. Marrow the ex-gardener bearing in her arms a white-plush-coated child of eight months, his white woolly cap bristling with War-badges, his eyes tightly closed, and his mouth stretched to a cavern emitting roar after roar.

"Can't do anything with him," explained Mrs. Marrow in a shriek above the uproar, with an apologetic dip towards Miss Urquhart. "He woke up sudden, and I suppose finding hisself all among strangers, pore lamb, in a place he wasn't used to——"

"Oh, *lor!* Givvim to me, then. *Come* on, Herbert," exclaimed Mrs. Stanley Hawkins, grabbing her son, not too gently, into her petunia-pink

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embrace. "There! Tinker! Young Terror, ain't you? Leave *orf*——"

And, as if by magic, the bellowing ceased. With the vibrations of it still quivering in the air, with the tears still rolling down the rose-red and bulging cheeks, the Pantomime-girl's baby drew a long, sobbing breath and then grinned the ineffable grin of Naughtiness Triumphant.

"Ah," said the baby-boy. "M'—gur!"

The next thing to happen was as sudden and as unexpected as that lull to a tempest.

For Miss Eleanor Urquhart, moving rapidly as she was never known to move, took a hasty diffident step towards the group, gazed with a moved and transfigured face upon Master Herbert Hawkins, and cried aloud, "Oh, Pansy, what, *what* a darling! . . . Oh! You *sweet*! . . . Can't I hold him for *just* a minute?"

"Well, if he'll go to you—" returned the young Mother, taken aback and mollified; and Eleanor put out her hands, cooing invitation.

For a moment the child hesitated. Then the complacent grin creased his pink face once more, and he stretched out his little arms, stiff in the thick plush sleeves towards the instinctively-recognised, the born Baby-worshipper.

And for the next few minutes those two wives saw Eleanor Urquhart absolutely at her best;

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holding and playing with a little child. For she was of the type of which the perfect nurse is made ; and not the good-natured, capable Mrs. Marrow not the sumptuous Pansy, not the beautiful Rosamond, beloved of men, well-fitted to be the mother of men, would ever learn quite that lovely gesture with which plain, severe little Eleanor cradled in her arms another woman's child.

" I didn't ought to have said off all I did say to you, Miss Urquhart, but I *was* wild," admitted Pansy, ruefully, as she took leave at the garden-door of the little organiser whom she had never resented less. " It's not you ; it's those *friends* of yours I haven't been able to stick ; if you don't mind me saying so ; still, if there weren't some o' that sort, there'd be one sort less. And I've been to blame, myself. I know I didn't ought to have passed myself off as a single young girl and gone to that Hostel, but there ! Nobody calls themselves ' Mrs. ' in my profesh' ; and I swear none of those other girls, Miss Urquhart, had a word of anything Married, as you might call it, from *me*. I—— "

(" OOgully-googully," said Pansy's baby-boy.)

" N-n-n-never mind, Pansy. You go and have some tea with Mrs. Marrow, will you ? "

" It was all because I was weaning my little Herb ! " the Principal Boy persisted. " He'd always slept in an old property-box in the dressing-room

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while I went on, Miss Urquhart, and I'd given him his feed at ten there, regular, every night. (More than lots of 'em would !) And I said, ' Well, if I've got to drop it, go away I *must*, and so—— ' "

(" Goo an' glue," said the baby.)

" It is all right," said Miss Urquhart, standing there with one finger still lingering in the baby-boy's pink clutch. " We'll forget about it now."

" There's something else I was gassing about," added the young Reservist's wife, uneasily, " that I didn't ought, and that I've p'raps got off all wrong, and that I hope you'll forget, too—— "

" Very well, Pansy," said Miss Urquhart with her most business-like nod of farewell. " Good-bye, you *Duck*— " to the baby.

Pansy knew, as well as Eleanor knew herself, that what she had said about a *fiancé* and about another girl was something not to be readily " forgotten " by a bride-to-be.

And Eleanor Urquhart, outwardly busied with the tea for the Meeting, thought of little else but that " something " for the rest of the afternoon—except of the slow passage of the time to the hour when Ted Urquhart had said he would be coming back, from his business in London, to The Court.

With a beating heart and a catch at her throat the girl who was to be married on the morrow decided, " I shall speak to him about it. I shall ask *him*."

CHAPTER VIII

ALLIES

THE Reservists' Wives, together with Miss Octavia Fabian, who for the first time that she had visited The Court had not been pressed to stay for dinner, had all gone by the time that Ted Urquhart, rather out of spirits and irritable, returned to his house from a day in London spent between the War Office and the outfitter's. All was in order now. He might expect to be off on the following Monday or Tuesday, ready married, will made, everything. There were a few people to say Good-bye to. One young woman, to whom he'd thought he'd like to say a friendly Good-bye, after all had turned her back on him just as he was opening his mouth to say it. Well, the other one had agreed without demur to becoming his wife at once. And in the late afternoon sunlight this girl was waiting to meet him on the Terrace as he jumped down from the motor; she came quickly forward, and for the first time since he and she had been engaged, young Urquhart saw that Eleanor, his betrothed, seemed really glad to see him.

"You are late, aren't you?" she said in a queer

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breathless little voice. "I thought you were never coming back, Ted."

"Do you know, that is the nicest thing you have ever said to me, Eleanor?" said Ted, looking down upon the prim little figure, and feeling rather touched. She did care then, whether he came or went? Well, that was something, when another girl had just shown him so very plainly that she preferred him to go. Eleanor, after all, had got a scrap of ordinary womanly feeling for him tucked away under all that chilly and matter-of-fact crust of hers? That was an edge of silver to the black cloud of depression into which there seemed to be setting the sun of this day before Ted Urquhart's wedding.

He smiled quite gratefully down into the big anxious brown eyes that the bride-to-be lifted to his face.

"It isn't so very late," he suggested. "Half an hour before we dress. What about going for a stroll all round? We may not have time to-morrow. Or are you tired, Eleanor?"

"N-no. Oh, no. I'm not tired. Let's go for a walk before we go into the house. I'd like it" said Eleanor, quite eagerly. "I—I w-wanted to have a little talk with you, if I could."

"Rather," he said, brightening a little. "Come along."

He tossed his hat on to a chair in the hall, and came down the steps again. "We'll do the grand

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tour of our estate, shall we ? " said Ted Urquhart with determined cheerfulness to the girl so soon to be his wife. They turned along the Terrace to the right, towards the park that led through the rose-garden, and to the new fish-pond.

" It's a jolly evening, isn't it ? " said the bridegroom-to-be, raising his eyes to the apricot sky patterned with pink fleecy clouds. The soft air with the September nip in it was full of the scent of tall tobacco-plants that grew jungle-thick at the back of the herbaceous border on the south of the rose-garden ; nearer to the path were clumps of ragged glowing double dahlias, sulphur-yellow orange, cardinal-red ; a huge blot of richest purple marked the China asters and next to these ran a long splash of shrieking scarlet, salvias. " Gorgeous weather for autumn ; I've never seen this bit of the garden look so ripping," said young Urquhart, gazing at the English flowers under the English sunset. " This is my good-bye to it, Eleanor."

" Yes," said Eleanor, with that agitated little quaver in her voice that moved him and hurt him because it lacked power to move him more. At least the little thing was sorry he was off. The near parting was stirring up what feelings she had ; or the near wedding.

Some girls were like this, he thought ; made on such conventional lines that when they really definitely belonged to a man they were automatically

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"fond" of him; sad to think of his going. And when—if he came back, Eleanor would become as automatically glad to welcome her husband.

That thought brought a gleam of comfort. There was just a sporting chance that he and she, together, might find married happiness at last—at least, as much happiness as many couples. . . . They would be not strangers, but allies even if they never might be lovers. If only he had never seen another; if only he had never given himself up to those mad dreams of that golden-haired girl pacing this very garden at his side!

"Come and have a look at the pond," he said hastily to Eleanor, who was strangely silent as they walked along. All her usual store of trite little platitudes seemed to have forsaken her; she seemed to have nothing to say this evening. And yet she had volunteered that she'd wanted "a little talk" with him! Perhaps she only wanted to be, quite quietly, with him. Perhaps she didn't want to speak at all.

But when they reached the round pond with the grey stone border and stood looking at that smooth mirror to the sky, blotched at one side with lily-pads, Eleanor Urquhart spoke, her queerly agitated little voice breaking through the heavy country quiet.

"Ted! I want to say something to you!"

"Oh, yes?" He turned, looking down at her again.

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" It—it's rather d-d-difficult ! "

" Is it ? " said Ted Urquhart, encouragingly, and wondering what this might be. Perhaps she was going to ask him what he wished done about some business or other in the event of his being wiped off the slate out there ? It was rather " difficult," perhaps, for a girl who was not yet a wife to ask for her instructions as a widow, he thought whimsically as he added kindly, " surely you can tell me—we're getting married to-morrow, and—— "

" That's just it," gasped Eleanor. She clenched her small hands. There lingered on her palms the aromatic scent of the rosemary twigs she had clutched at for support when Pansy blurted out those revelations in the kitchen-garden. The memory of what that girl had said spurred Eleanor to bring out, with a little breathless rush, what she herself wanted to say.

" Ted ! Is it true ? Something I heard. S-something somebody has just t-told me. That you liked somebody . . . were in love with somebody else ? "

Young Urquhart's tall elastic figure seemed to stiffen all over into angry alertness.

" Who ? " he demanded.

He meant " who said it ? " But Eleanor mistook his question and answered without reserve.

" They said you were in love with Rosamond Fayre."

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"What's this?" he took up angrily. "Who's been talking to you?"

"Pansy Vansittart—you know her——"

—"Oh, Lord," from Ted below his breath.

—"was here this afternoon. She was very angry. She said it to hurt me, I think," his *fiancée* explained rapidly. "But I want to know, from you, whether it's really true?"

The tall young man and the small girl stood confronting each other above their own contrasted reflections in the still waters at their feet.

He spoke quietly now.

"Eleanor, will you believe me? I swear that there is nothing—absolutely nothing between me and any woman. Since I've been engaged to you I haven't said a word to any woman that you could not have heard."

"B-but that's not what I asked you!" the engaged girl took up with a helpless, repudiating gesture of her hands. "Why do m-m-men always answer one like this? Always something that's got nothing to d-do with the question! Is it true? What Pansy said! Is it? I want to be told!"

"Well, but look *here*—" began the young man, cruelly embarrassed, bewildered.

He took a few steps away from the side of the lily-pond, towards the path that went up beyond the clipped, box-peacocks-and-windmill hedge, to the smaller lawn where Eleanor's girls had danced. Eleanor followed him; every movement of her small

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figure, the pose of her dark head one urgent, repeated demand.

"Is it true?"

"Look here, Eleanor," he began again. "I must tell you that she—the girl you speak of—would simply—Well! I don't know what she'd do for surprise if she heard what you said. She—why, if it ever occurred to her——"

"N-never mind her. That isn't it. Oh," Eleanor cried desperately, "c-c-can't you answer what I'm asking you? Ted!" she put out a hand and clutched his sleeve even as she had clutched that rosemary bush. "This is the first time I've ever asked you to d-do anything for me. Won't you do this?" Her voice was the voice of an appealing and frightened child. "Ted! Will you tell me?"

"All right. I will tell you," said the young man quickly and firmly. That touching, unexpected, girlish appeal had made up his mind for him. The poor child! Poor little mite, hiding that jealous affection until admission was forced from her like this! There remained only one thing for the man she cared for to do. Namely, to obey the Eleventh Commandment at Eton; to tell a lie, to tell a good 'un, and to stick to it. And so he declared, without a quiver, "It's all a mistake, Eleanor! It isn't true."

"Not true?" muttered Eleanor, and her hand dropped from his sleeve. "You're sure, Ted?"

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"Quite sure," insisted Ted Urquhart briskly.
"It was all rot, my dear."

The next moment the small girl at his side had made such an impulsive movement that he thought she was going to fling her arms wide to him.

But she had only taken a couple of steps backward.

There was a rustic bench beside that path, backed by the clipped hedge. Blindly, and as if pushed down by a crushing blow, Eleanor's compact little figure collapsed upon that seat. She dropped her dusky head upon both her hands and broke into uncontrollable sobs. . . .

Poor little soul! Poor, overwrought little thing—Lord, how he wished she wouldn't! . . . Even if she were crying for joy—what could be done to stop it?

Suffering acutely from this sight of a woman in tears—Eleanor, of all women!—and on his behalf, too!—Ted Urquhart plopped down hastily beside his *fiancée* on the bench.

"Eleanor. Look here, Eleanor, *please*——"

He put his long arm about her shoulders.

He was ill-prepared for the brusque, the intense gesture with which Eleanor drew herself back.

"No. Oh, Ted, if you *don't* mind, I can't bear to be touched!"

"Sorry," he said, mystified, and dropping his arm. "What have I done——?"

"Oh, nothing. I know you can't help it, but—b-b-but oh! it was so *awful* when you said that

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just now," sobbed Eleanor Urquhart out of her handkerchief. "All—all the afternoon since Pansy spoke I've been thinking—and thinking—M-M-M-Making up my mind that she m-m-must be right! G-G-Going back and remembering things and thinking I'd *n-n-noticed*! F-Feeling quite c-convinced that you did c-care for Rosamond, and that it was all t-t-true! And now you say it isn't. Oh! Oh! After I'd *hoped*——"

"Hoped," echoed Ted Urquhart blankly. "I don't understand, Eleanor. I don't quite ~~under~~stand. D'you mean—? Can you mean *you* wanted it to be true that I cared for somebody else?"

"Yes! Of *c-course*!" sobbed the bride-to-be desperately. "Because then—then I needn't—I shouldn't be exp-pup-*pected* to marry you to-morrow!"

"Good Heavens!" said the bridegroom-to-be sitting up very straight and staring at her. "Is *this* how you feel about it, Eleanor?"

"Yes! I'm sorry! I c-c-can't help it! I have tried!" declared Miss Urquhart, struggling to fight down her sobs. "I thought I could d-do it! F-For Father's sake and everybody's! I thought I could bear it all, without showing anything! I thought I could be strong and bub-brave enough——"

"Brave enough?"

"Yes, and so I was; until there s-seemed to be a *chance* of g-getting out of it! And n-now—even

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if that isn't true about Rosamond—of c-course I hate p-putting you out and d-disappointing Father and all that! B-B-Breaking my word at the eleventh hour! Cuc-cancelling my appointments—a thing I *never* do, really," wept Miss Urquhart, defensively "still, I c-can't do the other. Oh, don't ask me to go on with that dreadful wedding to-morrow, Ted——"

She turned to him, her small face broken up, quivering.

"L-let me off!"

"But of course. Oh! Certainly. Rather," broke in Ted Urquhart, precipitately but mechanically, for he was almost numb with amazement over the true cause of the girl's emotion. "I say—please don't consider yourself bound in any way, please let me give you back your freedom," he concluded, "here and now!"

"Oh, you *are* good!" cried Eleanor, one tremble of relief. "If you're sure you don't m-mind very much——"

"It's quite all right," he said, too discomfited for further words. "Quite all right. I ought to have guessed, perhaps. If you'd said a word——"

"Oh, but I was t-trying—so *hard*—not to show how I minded——"

Ted Urquhart gave a short and very bitter laugh. "I seem to be remarkably unlucky in the way of pleasing any woman," he said. And he raised the gallant young head of which nine out of ten women

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would not have denied the attractiveness, and stared away above the lime trees. He scarcely saw that quickly yellowing sky, speckled with homing rooks ; what he saw was a picture of the golden knot of hair above the supple shoulders of that girl who'd also turned her back on him. "I am sorry," he muttered, half to himself, "that I manage to put you off like this——"

"Oh, it isn't *you*, Ted. I don't think that being engaged to you would be worse than being engaged to lots of other people," pleaded Eleanor deprecatingly, raising her blurred eyes to his again. "It's only that *I* hated it so, especially when the actual D-Day was fixed ! And then—it got n-n-nearer and nearer to b-being m-married ! Oh ! I tried to th-think of how F-Father wished it, and of how k-kind you'd been ;—b-but all the time I knew how I should hate being your w-wife—*Anybody's*, I mean ! " she corrected herself, hastily, picking and clutching at a wet handkerchief. "I always think a m-married woman is only *half* an ind-d-dividual, as Miss Fabian says. She g-gives up her p-personality, her privacy ; she isn't *herself*, somehow, any more ; oh, I couldn't ! " she pleaded, bewilderedly. "I don't know why I'm like this——"

"Don't, child—don't," said young Urquhart, confused beyond words at this burst of confidence, unrestrained as are the rare confidences of the naturally self-contained. "Don't bother to explain——"

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"I only want you to see it isn't only b-because it was you I was so urhappy," she persisted. "I don't know whether it's because I detest the smell of their cigarettes so, or what, but," with a rush of unmistakable sincerity, "I *don't* like men!"

Ted Urquhart looked at her; at this girl of a type not uncommon, but nearly always misjudged.

To her, love for a man would be limited to nurse-love for him at the age of Pansy's baby-boy; she could delight in the sight of that fruit of Love even while the sweetness of its blossom sickened and disgusted her. To the end, men would say of that inborn aversion, "Ah! Sour grapes!"

Perhaps it was because Urquhart was rather more understanding than many of his sex, that he realised it was not out of place to say—"I say, then, will you forgive me for giving you what must have been rather a beast of a time?"

A moment later he was holding Eleanor's little spare brown hand in a warmer and more affectionate grip than it had ever known.

"Oh, Ted, you have been nice! I shall like you so!" she said with a gulp, "as a cousin!"

"That's something," he said with a queer mixture of ruefulness and amusement in his tone. "In spite of this bust-up, and the War, and what not, we're parting friends, at all events, aren't we?"

"Of course. I've n-n-never known you before, but this makes such a difference," she said, drawing

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a long breath and disengaging one of the hands ; her left one. " I can give you this back now——"

" This " was the famous Urquhart sapphire, set with diamonds, that Eleanor drew off as gladly as another engaged girl might have assumed her ring.

" Wear it on the other hand, then, won't you ? " suggested her *ex-fiancé* gently. " Just to show there's no ill-will—a dis-engagement present, eh ? Please do. I'd like you to——"

" But when you get married," objected his cousin, " this ring is supposed to go to your wife ! "

" All right, all right. Perhaps you'll send it to me," said young Urquhart, briefly, " when there's a wife to think of. You keep it, Eleanor."

He rose, as she did. They began to stroll down that path, round to the lime tree Avenue that Ted had once paced alone, when he had wondered in what words he could most gently break to Eleanor that he wished to cancel that futile and flavorless engagement of theirs.

And now it was she who had found the words to break it off.

In the shadows under the limes her voice broke the stillness again.

" Ted ! I do think it's a pity ! "

" What's a pity ? If you can't," he said soothingly, " you can't."

" I d-don't mean it's a pity we aren't getting married. I mean it's rather a pity that, after all, you don't care for Rosamond Fayre."

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"Oh, that," he said curtly. "Rather a good thing, actually. The girl never could stand me."

"Couldn't she? Why not? She never said so."

"H'm," said Ted Urquhart, and closed his lips as he paced along by the side of the other girl who had not been able to "stand" him, at least as a prospective husband. Then there fell upon him, suddenly, a great and aching need to talk about that first girl, to some one, any one. The little cousin at his side was not (now) unsympathetic. He turned to her and said, quickly, "Besides! Supposing that had been true—what your friend Miss Pansy made up her mind about! I should have had no chance to cut that other fellow out."

"What other fellow?"

"Man she—Miss Fayre—was engaged to."

Out of the dusk Eleanor's voice sounded mildly surprised.

"I don't think Rosamond—I'm sure she wasn't engaged to be married."

"Oh, I think she was," said Ted Urquhart.

And the dreariness of his tone struck through even the calm absorption of the girl who had just regained her freedom, and who said, quickly, "Why are you so sure about Rosamond?"

Again he laughed that short and bitter laugh, pausing for a moment under the limes just at the spot where, weeks before in the dusk, he had caught that soft sound of a kiss that had been his torture ever since. But he only said briefly. "Well,

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Eleanor, you saw them too. You saw the fellow when he came down to call on her."

"Nobody came to call on Rosamond here, though," objected Eleanor, "except that young Mr. Bray whom Father took such a fancy to."

"Well, that's what I meant."

"Oh, but, Ted," protested Eleanor, quite eagerly, "I am sure Rosamond doesn't want to marry *him*!"

"Are you?" said Urquhart. Hope, last of all feeling to die, seemed to stir for a second within him, as he added quickly, "Is that just what you *think*? Or have you any special reason for saying this?"

Eleanor, bright and matter-of-fact as if no crucial words were passing her lips, uttered the sentence that caused that stirring Hope to leap to life in her cousin's heart.

"Yes. I have a special reason, Ted."

What was this?

"What is it?" he demanded brusquely. He took her by the arm. "I say, Eleanor! If there's anything in this, for God's sake tell me what you know!"

"You do care, then? How frightfully queer men are! I should never understand them. How is one to tell *what* they mean?" reflected Eleanor aloud. And she went on to say, "Well! Only a week or two ago I asked Rosamond if she would give me Mr. Cecil Bray's address. You know he got on so well with Father about those genealogical charts

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and all that, I thought he'd cheer Father up, and that it would be nice to ask him down for the week-end, as he couldn't stay last time. But Rosamond said—was that the dressing-gong ? ”

“ What,” demanded Urquhart, “ did she say ? ”

“ She said, ‘ *Oh, do you mind not asking him while I’m in the house ?* ’ ”

“ She said that ? ” took up Ted Urquhart in an expressionless voice. “ Perhaps it was because she didn’t want the affair given away.”

“ No, it wasn’t,” insisted Eleanor, “ because I said, ‘ *But, Rosamond, don’t you want him here with you ? I thought he was such an old friend of yours :* ’ And she s-s-s- ”

It seemed to Eleanor’s listener that he waited for an hour while Eleanor got the better of that little stutter of hers and went on.

“ Rosamond said, ‘ *He is an old friend, but he’s always asking to be something more. And I don’t wish it.* ’ ”

“ She said she ‘ didn’t wish it ? ’ You’re certain of that, Eleanor ? ” her cousin said breathlessly. “ What do you suppose she meant by it ? ”

“ I thought she meant what she said, at the time. But really it’s so difficult to tell, it seems to me,” complained Miss Urquhart. “ First people say one thing—and then another. Like you, when you said—— ”

“ I know,” interrupted the dazed Ted feverishly. “ That is, I don’t know what I said, or what I’m

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going to say. I only know I've got to say something, and as soon as I can manage it, to Her—— ”

“ To Rosamond Fayre, d'you mean ? ” took up Eleanor ; even Eleanor's instinct could recognise and apply that capital H in the young man's voice.

“ Yes.”

“ Very w-well ; then I'll give you her address and you can motor yourself back to town this evening while I talk to Father,” planned his cousin swiftly. “ I broke off the engagement, you know. I have to explain that—— ”

“ Will you also explain that I shall never come down to the Court again except as a guest—your guest ? ” put in young Urquhart. “ I say, though—perhaps I'd better stay,” ruefully, “ and tell that to Uncle Henry myself—— ”

“ You can tell him anything l-later. You'd better go now, m-my dear boy. I know you w-want to. And g-give my love to Rosamond,” she added quite diffidently. “ Ask her if she'll come down. If not, I'll come and see her. I—I—I—You know, being engaged made me all so upset and cross,” declared his cousin, “ that I was rude to her, I'm afraid, before she w-went. I've been horrid—— ”

“ Eleanor, you've been a little trump ! ”

“ You've been so good to me, Ted,” declared his new ally affectionately.

He took both her hands again as they reached the house.

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"Eleanor," he began again, unsteadily laughing a little, for his head was still in a whirl, "I say, I haven't been smoking. D'you think you could bring yourself to let me have a kiss, Dear?"

Apparently Eleanor could; quite promptly.

But as her *ex-fiancé* strode off towards the garage and she turned into the house, she thought to herself, "Thank goodness he never said those sort of things to me while we were engaged! It would have been nearly as bad as what Pansy said. Oh, I could never have stood it," decided the girl who was destined to remain Miss Urquhart, and to be happy in her lot, "if there had been much *more* love-making like that!"

CHAPTER IX

WAR-PAINT

ALL the way up to town again Ted Urquhart drove along the Kentish roads like a madman, not caring if he were stopped, but knowing that this would be unlikely to occur.

For in these days the police did not readily hold up a motor car that was speeding along apparently upon urgent business, and driven by an officer wearing His Majesty's uniform. And this—the one rather theatrical act of his life—Mr. Ted Urquhart had committed.

He had, after his interview with Eleanor, lingered at Urquhart's Court not long enough to have anything to eat ("dinner? Shan't want it," he'd smiled at the enquiring parlourmaid), but sparing himself just the time to get into the khaki and the accoutrements that had come home.

This would save some explanation to Miss Fayre. She'd see that, whether at the eleventh hour or not, he'd volunteered. He needn't tell her that.

He debated what he *would* tell her; how he'd begin; picking and choosing and altering sentences as he whizzed along with stretches of road, gates

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and hedges springing into the focus of his headlights for a flash, then dropping behind. That planning, too, he presently dropped behind him.

He remembered how much of his time since he'd met that girl had been passed in just this profitless occupation of making up his mind that he *must* say something to her. And then something else had invariably happened to put a stopper on it. There should be no stopper to-night. . . .

That day in France he'd had "something to say" to her—and she'd nipped it in the bud with the curtest little snub he'd ever received.

That afternoon when he'd returned to the Court he'd had "something" to say. He'd arranged just what crows he had to pluck with that golden-haired minx—and then had come the staggering revelation that the girl with whom he'd fallen in love was not the girl he had to marry.

That evening after the Hen-party he'd had "something to say," something crucial—and it had been swept aside by another revelation, causing him to believe that she was engaged to another man.

Even to-day on the Horse Guards Parade he had nearly said "something" else. It was only a Good-bye—but she'd turned her back on it!

And to think that She had never had an idea of all these planned "somethings" of Ted Urquhart! So far his courtship of Rosamond Fayre—for, looking back on all the mistakes and tangles and misunderstandings, he could only admit that the impulse and

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mainspring of Courtship was there—So far the courtship had gone on in the depths of his own heart only. It had all taken place, as Pansy would say, "off" There should be a change to-night. . . .

Then as he sat with his hands on the wheel, his impatient eyes fixed ahead, a thought steadied and sobered him. There remained that unforgettable moment under the lime-trees, the hardest that Ted Urquhart had ever lived through. There remained that sound of a kiss to another man. . . .

The memory of it dashed all the mad rush of hopeful high spirits in which he'd whirled the car down the avenue and out on to the London Road.

It was a very grave-faced young man in khaki, with a heart that seemed sinking into his brown boots and with the look in his eyes of a man who is staking his all upon a single throw, who pulled up at last in the little street off Ebury Street, who jumped out of the car and knocked at that green door with "Madame Cora's" brass plate affixed.

Madame Cora, startled, opened the door with a "now-whatever's-this" look on her astute small face.

"Good evening!" said the tall and khaki-clad apparition who stood on the whitened step blocking out the view of the dimmed street-lamps. "Could you tell me if this is where Miss Fayre is staying?"

"Ah! . . . Yes it is," said the landlady swiftly.

In a flash she had arrived at one of those con-

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clusions, which right or wrong, women preface with the phrase "Something told me. . . ."

"If this young officer here isn't what it's all about that's making Miss Fayre seem so quiet these days!" thought the landlady with conviction.

"Moping up in her room this minute over the Ad-Verts in the *Morning Post*. This must be the meaning of it all, true as I stand here. Fancy."

"Could I see her?" asked the tall visitor, moving so that the light of the hall gas fell upon the resolute and tanned face under the Service cap, upon the light, impatient eyes, upon the firm mouth with the small cropped moustache.

"Smart fellow, I call him; nice couple they'd look," thought the little landlady even while she replied doubtfully, "Well, I don't know. I think Miss Fayre was dressing to go out to a party or something——"

The visitor's face became blankness incarnate at the news.

"Still, I'll run up and see if she'll speak to you a minute before she goes," amended the landlady.

"If you'll go in there a minute I'll just pop up."

The young man went into the room she indicated; a small parlour of which the whole of one side was taken up by a long pier-glass. A round table occupied the centre of the room under the gasolier; it was piled high with Fashion-papers; "Modes Parisiennes," "Delineator's," "Chics." A chiffonier at the side held books of patterns (cloth,

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satin, Japanese silks) and a silver-topped biscuit-box. The mantelpiece and overmantel were crowded with cheap china; the pictures were an enlarged photograph of the late Mr. Core in Freemason's insignia, a coloured print of "Carnation, Lily, Rose," from the Tate Gallery, and another of a picture called "Reunion." A couple of albums spread among the fashion-papers showed that Madame Cora had, some years ago, collected picture post-cards. Also snapshots. . . .

All these, with other details, the visitor was to be allowed ample time to study while he waited, fuming, for the girl he had come to see.

For Mrs. Core, "popping" upstairs to Miss Fayre's room, thought to herself, "I shan't tell her who's come to see her, no fear! Flurrying and hurrying her; and her in that old crêpe blouse when I know for certain she'd want to look specially nice. She shall, too."

With a tap at the door the little woman slipped into the room where Rosamond Fayre sat on the edge of her narrow bed, studying her *Morning Post* listlessly enough.

"Not busy, are you? Wish you'd do something to please me," said the landlady ingratiatingly. "Will you, Miss Fayre?"

"What is it?" asked Rosamond, looking up with a rather subdued little smile.

"Well, I've never had a sight of that pink lisse

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of yours, since I sent it home. . . . Wish you'd just slip it on now to let me have a look, could you ? . . . In this long drawer is it ? . . . Ah ! . . . It'll go over your head . . . Tuck this thing here down a bit more . . . That's right. There . . . I'll do you up."

And her clever, hard-worked fingers busied themselves with the fastenings of that dress that Rosamond Fayre had only worn once—for five minutes. She'd tried it on just that one evening at The Court, and had nearly gone down to dinner in it. Then she'd taken it off again. . . . Three corolla'd, petal-flounced, rose-pink, it really was, as she'd thought, a flower turned into a frock.

"Looks beautiful on you, Miss Fayre, and no mistake," declared the little dressmaker decidedly, as she put her head on one side to contemplate that shining vision of gold and ivory and rose. "Pity you can't go about all day long in evening-dress, with your shoulders and neck! Pity you aren't just off to a dance now, eh? Got any sort of a wrap to wear with this?"

Rosamond murmured something about the black satin cape in the cupboard. She felt, however, that she would never be going off to a dance again as long as she lived. Somehow she had a presentiment that nothing interesting could ever happen to her again; somehow this evening everything seemed over. . . . Over. . . .

"Throw that coat across your arm then, just to try

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the effect as if you were off out. Your hair's all right as it is. Lovely. But slip on those little suede slippers o' yours. You can't really tell a dress with the wrong shoes," decreed Madame Cora, for the moment all costumier. "Now look at yourself—Gracious! Can't see much of yourself in this rubbishy little shaving-mirror, can you? Remind me to put you another one in to-morrow. Better pop down now and take a look at yourself in the long glass in my fitting-room—dear."

Shrewd kindness glinted in the eyes, out of which all illusions had been wiped, as the little woman-toiler hurried downstairs with the Beauty in the pink frock that had been the work of her hands.

"Give her every chance, at all events," was the unspoken thought of Mrs. Core. "If that's the One and Only she'll be thankful for ever that she had on her pink when he came. Supposed to make no difference to the man what a girl's got on! It's her the difference is made to. Shan't forget my poor Harry comin' up to the scratch when I was all anyhow and my head tied up for the Spring-cleaning. Way men *spoil* things if they can! . . . But whatever's happened or going to happen about Miss Fayre and her young gentleman that's in this tearin' hurry to see her she'll be glad she was turned out daintily for the occasion. Him in uniform and all."

Here the little woman opened the door of that

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small fitting-room She gave one last touch, that was almost a gentle dash, to the back of the pretty pink bodice.

"Someone that you know in there!" she announced. Then, standing outside herself, she closed the door, briskly and decisively, upon the entrance of Rosamond Fayre.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST FENCE

ROSAMOND, entering, beheld a khaki-clad back.

The young man who owned it was sitting at the little dressmaker's journal-strewn table, his head bent over something that he seemed to be taking out of his jacket-pocket.

Khaki again—it conveyed to Miss Fayre the thought of the only young man in khaki who was likely to be there, calling upon her. Glad and sorry at once, she came forward with a little rush, and a hurried, "I thought you'd *gone*, Cecil?"

He stood up—how surprisingly *tall* in that rig? He turned. "Sorry. It isn't Cecil," he said, looking straight into her eyes.

"Oh! It's—Why, it's Mr. Urquhart," the girl said breathlessly, hardly believing her own senses. "Is it?"

"Yes," he said gloomily. He felt that the encounter could not have opened worse, for him. He repeated mechanically, "It isn't Cecil."

"No, I see. For a minute I thought it was Mr. Bray. He's in the Territorials. I thought it must

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be. I didn't expect to see you—or in uniform, of course," said Rosamond, wishing that she could speak without that absurd and silly flutter (of surprise) that took her breath and made her hand shake. She steadied it on the back of a chair and stood facing him, wondering.

"Are—are you joining, too, then?"

"Yes, after being kept waiting for an age," he said moodily. "I wanted to join, of course, the day after War was declared."

"Oh, yes?" said Rosamond. And now, after all, she was not surprised. It was so natural to see him in those things; the jacket that looked as if he'd been born in it, had grown with it; the belt, the sword, those buttons, the turn-down collar about his strong throat with the gold safety-pin beneath that knitted tie of khaki silk. That was one of the silly little details that catch a woman's attention, so difficult to fix on larger matters afoot. Rosamond found that tie delightful. She loved that tie—only the tie, of course. . . . Yes, she might have known he would be wearing these things at the very first chance he was given. Of course . . . of course! This explained matters. And so this was why his wedding had been hurried on for to-morrow!

"Eleanor—I suppose Eleanor sent you," she suggested, still flutteringly, "with some commission for me?"

"No," he said. He stared at her; feasting at last the eyes, which he had schooled not to look

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on the rose-pink jewel in that ramshackle of a little gas-lit room. "That is, Eleanor did send me——"

She was looking at his Service-cap, flung down on the table, and answered rather foolishly.

"Well, which, Mr. Urquhart?" she laughed; a forced little laugh.

"Both—in a way," he said, still looking hard at her. "Eleanor did send me—but I've something on my own account to settle up with you, Miss Fayre."

"Oh, yes?" she said again. That fluttering went (thank goodness!), leaving her sore, and angry, and proud. She drew herself up, laying the black silk cape she had carried down on the table beside his cap. She was putting herself on the defensive, then. She continued with rather a hard note in her pretty voice: "This is about—what?"

"You don't know, perhaps——"

He said it simply. But she chose to take it as irony.

"Yes. I suppose I do know. I suppose you want to have it out with me," she said a little defiantly, "about the letters? The ones I wrote for Eleanor."

"Well, I was going to speak about those, as a matter of fact," he admitted, jockeying about for a fresh start. "But you do take things for granted, don't you? The wrong things into the bargain. You've done that all this time about me!"

"Which time?" demanded Rosamond Fayre.

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"All the time I've known you. From the beginning, when——"

"When *you* thought," she took up quickly, "that I was a girl you might get to know without letting her know who you were!"

He, hotly, took her up here. "I never thought that!"

"But you did it."

"But what I thought was—I *thought*," he began, and wound up bluntly, in confusion, "I thought that you were somebody else. I imagined, like an ass, that you were Eleanor."

"I—Eleanor?"

"Well, I'd never seen her," he began to explain. "When I went over to France——"

"To spy," said Rosamond angrily, "on me—on her—on your *fiancée*——"

"Look here! 'Spy' is a very ugly word, especially just now," urged young Urquhart. "Can't you draw it a little more mildly than that? You never have given me any chance. I know it was a stupid thing to do. But I think I paid for it, don't you? You saw to that."

"I suppose you mean by writing that note to say that I knew who you were at the time," said the girl.

"That—and other things," said the man.

"Other things?"

"Yes," he said, flushing at the remembrance of her demure gibes, her glances, given or averted.

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"You know quite well you've never done anything but laugh at me——"

"One would think you were a *German* officer," scoffed Rosamond Fayre, "to mind so much being laughed at for being found out in a trick——"

This stung him. "I wasn't the only person who was playing tricks."

"You do mean those stupid letters, then? Very well," said Rosamond, with a little shrug of the white shoulders framed in the pink frock. "I can't say more than that I'm sorry about them. I have made a clean breast of them——"

"Oh, have you? If you'll forgive me for contradicting you, I don't think you've ever mentioned them," said Ted Urquhart stiffly, "to me."

"Well, Miss Urquhart did. She told me so. It was the same thing."

"Not at all," he objected. "It was something very different."

"I shouldn't have thought so. Miss Urquhart seemed to think that everything was in order about it, now. And I should have said," fenced Rosamond, "that *she* was the person to be considered."

"Not me?" he said, challengingly.

She would not look at him.

She said, as if very tired of this discussion, "Well! If you feel you really must go on like this, and ask a lot of questions about them! I don't know why you think it's necessary, and I don't see why you couldn't have done it while I was still at

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The Court," Rosamond protested, standing very erect behind that chair; "but never mind. I'm here."

The man who loved her was only too conscious of that fact. Every fibre in him was thrilling to the sight and the sound of her, to the thought that he was free to tell her so, directly. . . . But she was fastening upon him larkspur-blue eyes full of what seemed undeniable distaste.

"If you must cross-examine me about those idiotic letters, Mr. Urquhart," said Miss Urquhart's ex-secretary coldly, "let us go on and get it over. I did write them; five or six of them, I think it was. At all events I could tell you which were the ones I wrote, if you can produce them."

He produced the pocket-book over which his brown head had been bent when she came into the room. He took out a letter. He said, "D'you mind looking at this one?"

Rosamond took it, looked at it, and gave a sudden little gasp of horror.

It was a letter—and not a letter. She realised that here she was "caught out" in a mistake she thought she'd never made. It was the rough draft of that epistle of Eleanor's to the young man in the South American Camp—and yet it had nothing to do with Eleanor. It was the letter that had the love-names in it, written on the margin and scrawled over again, yet not so that a man could not read them, if he tried. It was the work

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of an idle hand guided by a brain drowsy with day-dreams !

And this young soldier, who'd had neither lot nor part in that dream, stood, tall and implacably real, before Rosamond, and asked quietly, " Did you write that ? "

Scarlet to the hair, she flung back at him, " I suppose you guessed that I did ? "

" Not when I got it," Urquhart said. " Not at first. Eleanor told me that the letter with the rose-leaves in it was the first one you'd written. This is the one."

" And you came—to show it to me—*Oh!*" faltered Rosamond.

Words failed her. She felt suddenly drooping ; she moved quickly to Mrs. Core's little horsehair sofa with its bright cushions of plush and crazy-work. She sat down, her hands clenched in her lap, her golden head bent to hide her hot and whelming blush from the profane eyes of this despicable and brutal young man. Here was the revenge that he was taking upon the girl who had dared ever to laugh at him. He'd come, the very night before his wedding and all, to display to her her own unbearable (because so silly) bit of self-revelation.

" Cad," thought Rosamond fiercely. " One doesn't expect to find any cads wearing khaki."

" I came to ask you about it," he said, standing above her so that her eyes were on a level with his

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sword-hilt. "I'm off, early next week. I'm going to ask you before I go—and, to start with this letter—" it rustled in his brown hand as he put the incredible question. "Why did you call me 'Darling'?"

"I?" She raised her golden head abruptly. He had not understood, after all? "What can you mean? That letter," she dropped her head again, "had nothing to do with *you*, Mr. Urquhart. I—I didn't mean *you*——"

"This is what we've got to have out," took up Ted Urquhart, with decision. "Now then——"

At this moment the hall-door bell tinkled shrilly.

There was a sound as of someone opening it, then talking; Mrs. Core's quick voice saying, "Dear me, you are late! I can't have you in the fitting-room. Someone there. Come upstairs——"

"Oh, it's a customer, and we—I am taking up the room," said Rosamond, hastily rising, feeling she welcomed the chance of escape. "Mr. Urquhart, if this was all you had to say to me——"

"It wasn't. Far from it," declared the young soldier grimly. "And I must speak to you. You can't pack me off like this. Look here; I tell you I'm off next week. I may not see you again—ever. I may never come back."

"Ah—don't!—it is so unfair!" cried Rosamond, suddenly wincing, "to use that sort of argument!"

"All's fair—sometimes," said Ted Urquhart, looking at her.

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

And in that moment both man and maid realised in some mysterious way that when they parted, it would not be as they had ever parted before.

Rosamond could not have said how this could be, since he was to marry Eleanor to-morrow. Ted Urquhart still suspected a "Cecil" between them. Only, without knowing how they were to arrive at it, it was as if each of them had had a glimpse of some distant and shining goal. In that moment they saw it so clearly that they could even pretend not to see it. They could quarrel and fence, with that warm, unfounded hope at their hearts that peace—and that goal—would yet be reached.

"If I can't stay and talk to you here, won't you," Ted Urquhart said, speaking more easily now, "come out with me for half an hour?"

"But—" she protested, with a glance about her.

"It's quite warm outside. Have this on," he urged gently, taking up from the table the soft satin cape, to put it about Rosamond's shoulders.

"Please don't—I don't think I'm coming," she said—and followed him.

In the little hall they passed the customer, with Mrs. Core, who threw out a quick "I shall be sitting up, don't worry."

Rosamond preceded Urquhart through the front door, into the quiet street.

"I could drive you about," suggested the young

THE LAST FENCE

man with a nod towards his waiting car, "if you liked?"

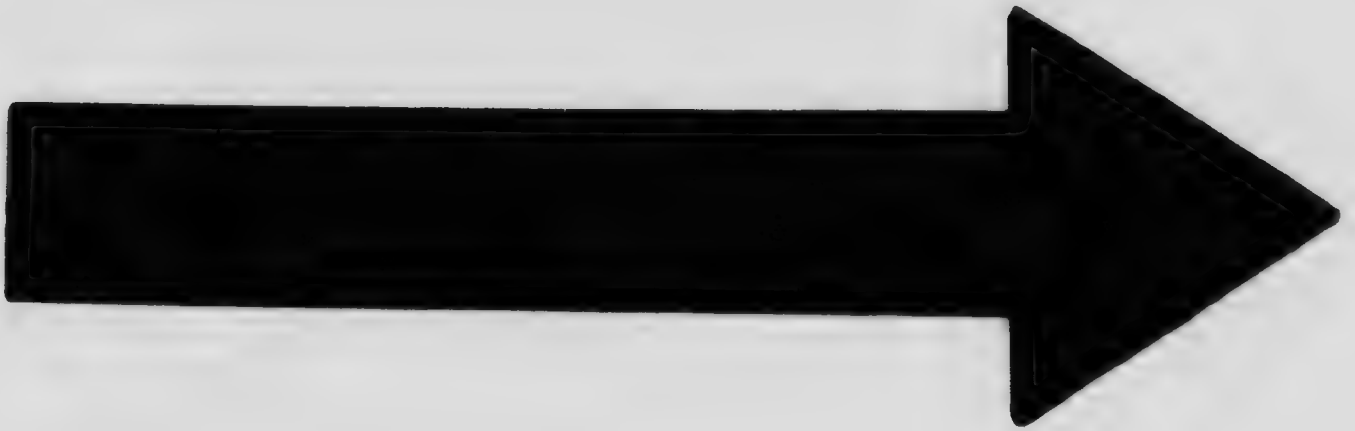
"No, no. We'll walk—but there's nothing really to talk about," declared Rosamond. "Really there's——"

"The Park?" suggested Urquhart at a turning.

"Very well, for a minute. But——"

In the warm autumn darkness they passed the big oblong mass of Buckingham Palace, unlighted now, save for a window here and there; they walked along the broad pavement, passing the sentries who stood to attention as this tall Engineer officer went by with his lovely, fair-haired lady in the evening coat, that showed a flounce of rose-pink below, and a pair of little, pattering suede shoes. They walked past the fountain of the towering Memorial; past the lawns with the geranium beds, scarlet in sunlight, but now squares and borders of a velvety and inky black. They turned aside to a walk shaded by trees on either side. In the grass further on, low-set lamps glared misleadingly. Above their heads in the deep sky, powdered with stars, a soft milky blotch appeared like a clouded moon. Another like patch of light appeared suddenly beside it; then, abruptly, both moons of white shifted and wheeled and became luminous shafts that chased each other across the heavens, eluding, pursuing, merging for a moment into one.

"Oh, look at those—" uttered Rosamond, surprised. "Look!"



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(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

The tall man moved his head impatiently above her.

"Never mind the searchlights for a minute. Listen to me, Miss Fayre. About that letter. About that 'darling' you wrote—which wasn't meant for me."

"You couldn't have thought it *was*!" interposed Rosamond.

"I'd little cause to flatter myself, once I'd met the writer. I suppose you'll say I might know who it *was* meant for," Ted Urquhart hazarded, "all things considered."

"Then you would know more than I did," retorted Rosamond.

"What d'you mean, Miss Fayre? D'you often write," he suggested, "without knowing who is to receive the letter?"

"That's meant to be horrid, but it's really only rather silly," said Rosamond loftily, as they retraced their steps. "If you really want so much to know about that—that *imbecile* scribble of mine, it wasn't 'to' anybody. Except, perhaps, to some sort of a young man-in-the-air, don't you know?"

"Do you mean," he said mystified, "an airman?"

"No! I don't know anybody in the Royal Flying Corps," sighed Rosamond, a little mischievously; "I mean—oh, just a sort of person of one's imagination. . . . You don't understand. You wouldn't."

"Imagination?" he repeated, and shook his head.

THE LAST FENCE

"All this is getting a bit too intricate and subtle for me. We might go on like this for ever. There are lots of things— Well, cutting that out——"

They had reached the end of that empty path. Rosamond made as if she would have walked back towards the great space before the Palace again, but he turned once more, and she walked beside him. Why not? Suddenly he stopped and faced her. Her eyes, now grown accustomed to the darkness, seemed to trace some change in the resolute face under the peaked cap. Undeniably there was a change in his voice as he said, "I don't care who you're engaged to. An engagement isn't irrevocable. It's not marriage, after all——"

"Who I am engaged to?" repeated Rosamond, standing still, and entirely bewildered. "I?"

"Yes. I know you thought it wasn't known."

"It—it isn't," returned Rosamond, beginning to wonder if this were just the very longest dream she had ever had? Whether another minute would not see it fade, that uncanny dark landscape of paths and bushes, that sultry gloom illuminated by the stars, the lurid, misleading lamps in the grass, the Titan beams of subdued light that swung and pursued each other across the skies? Whether she must not wake, to find herself in her little room in Ebury Street, alone——

And with that wonder came another, a paralysing sensation.

Breathless, she felt herself pondering, as if over

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

the falling petals of an imaginary flower, "He does, he *does* care for me. He doesn't. He does. He *can't*——"

Ted Urquhart's voice above her said, "You see, I knew."

"D'you mean you knew I was engaged?"

"Yes," he muttered, and again he was thinking gloomily that Eleanor must have been mistaken in what she'd said. Eleanor was so easily misled in what people "meant" when they were in love. Again he was steeped in that wretched memory of another dark sultry evening under trees, when the sound so near him was not the mingled and subdued murmur of London's traffic outside the Park, but the sound, punctuating the country silence, of that kiss.

Rosamond asked breathlessly, simply, "But—who to?"

She heard his short, savage laugh out of the soft gloom. "You needn't ask."

"Yes, I need. Please!" urged Rosamond. "Tell me. You must."

"That young fellow," he said sullenly, "Bray."

"Cecil? Cecil?"

"Exactly," said Ted Urquhart grimly. "'Cecil.'"

"But I—but he, poor dear boy—! What reason had you, Mr. Urquhart, for thinking so?"

"Quite a good reason, I take it," Urquhart said. "I heard—not my fault. I couldn't help hearing—"

"Somebody told you I was going to marry

THE LAST FENCE

Cecil *Bray*?" cried the girl with an indignation that was as a sudden cordial to the sorely-tried heart of her listener, who took up—

"No! Nobody said so. This was what happened. I was coming up the Avenue that evening after he'd had dinner at The Court, and I heard you—saying Good-bye to him. I heard——"

"Well, what?"

Ted Urquhart, feeling more than foolish, brought it out bluntly. "I heard him kiss you."

"*What*?" cried Rosamond, unmistakably aghast.

"He didn't kiss you?" eagerly.

"You thought *that*?"

"Upon my word I didn't know what else to think," said Urquhart, drawing a long breath.

"As a matter of fact, I wondered——"

"Perhaps you wondered," put in Miss Fayre scathingly, "whether it was *I* who'd kissed *him*?"

"Matter of fact, I did!" confessed Ted Urquhart out of the memory of tormented nights. "You see, it—I *thought* it was a kiss I heard, and, and——"

Rosamond laughed furiously. "If you must know," she said, with ice, "it *was* a kiss."

The ice entered Urquhart's heart. Then again hope, the ineffable, revived. Could it have been just her hand that she'd permitted to that boy?

"He was going away. And I was frightfully sorry. For him, if you *will* have it. And he took up the hem of my black chiffon scarf that I'd got

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

on ; like this ! ” she lifted a corner of the cape she wore. “ And he kissed that. I let him. It was all he could expect—— ”

Not even her hand !

“ Some people expect very little. Curious thing, they usually get it,” remarked Urquhart in a strained voice. He cleared his throat, adding, “ Are you really telling me that that youngster was nothing to you ? ”

“ Couldn’t you have seen that for yourself ? ” retorted Rosamond impatiently. “ Considering that I was so *specially* nice and kind and gentle to him, I should have thought it was obvious.”

Ted Urquhart said with an agitated hopeful laugh, “ You have always been a perfect little *Beast* to me.”

“ Oh, I *haven’t*—— ”

“ You have,” he insisted gladly. “ Consistently. From the first. Might that mean— ? Mightn’t it ? ”

Here Rosamond clenched the white ringless hands under her cape. She knew now the answer of the imaginary petals was “ *It’s true. He does love me !* ”

Steadying and hardening her voice she said, “ Mr. Urquhart, you haven’t the right to—— ”

“ That night I hadn’t ; no. I should have freed myself and taken my chance, though, if it hadn’t been for that—that *dashed* scarf-business. To-night,” his voice rang out clearly and joyously, “ I am free.”

THE LAST FENCE

"But to-morrow," she gasped, "you're marrying Eleanor?"

"Eleanor isn't marrying me. When it came to the point she wasn't having any. Sacked me," he exulted boyishly, "this afternoon!"

"She *sacked* you?" repeated Rosamond indignantly. A man less vain even than the man beside her might have caught the "Oh-how-could-she!" of the girl's tone. "Why?"

"She loathed the idea," he explained rapidly, "of me as a husband. But—look here, should you? . . . *Should* you? What do you think?"

Rosamond, with the goal shining and attained before her eyes, could only think, "He loves me, and *I must have known it all the time!*"

For one more second the moss-grown shackle of Tradition held her; the Law that was instilled into the "well-brought-up" maids of the Nineteenth Century. "*Thou shalt appear reluctant.*"

"Mustn't let him see I hoped so," she told herself feverishly. "Not, not at first—*They're* supposed not to think so much of you"—and she turned away from the man beside her.

She turned to gaze over the grass, speckled with those giant glowworms of the low-set lamps. She was glad they were far; that it was so dark along this deserted side-path, that there was nothing to betray that bewildered rapture of her look. But even as she turned, she found herself suddenly

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

girdled from behind by arms that seemed firm as a steel tyre about her.

She had only to say quietly, "Oh, please," and she would be released.

Or, less than that, she had only to let the lissom softness of her length turn to a rigid pillar in his arm.

She did think of it.

But the hold of a rusty fetter upon such as Rosamond Fayre is perhaps less strong than the hold of a tyre of steel. For in the same instant she thought rebelliously, "It isn't HIS sort of man who thinks less of a woman because she doesn't haggle and pretend! Must I? Need I? When I like him so *much*?"

Her lover spoke, unsteadily over her shoulder.

"Can't you be a little sweet to me now?" he muttered in her ear. "I've had such a mauling!"

"Oh; have you?" sighed Rosamond in pity and delight. He was ready, she knew, to face anything—yet here he was, at her mercy!

A "mauling?" Poor boy!

He pleaded, "There's so little time!"

Quickly she twisted herself about in his hold.

She faced him. Through the gloom she could guess the expression in his eyes; blazing, adoringly-vindictive, and exacting. "Such a mauling—" Ah, she must make that up to him!

To think that such a thing was her *Duty*!

THE LAST FENCE

Impulsively she put up her own arm from which the cape fell away. She took his neck into the soft curve of it.

"There," she gave a little sigh.

She felt as one who for long has battled against the tide, and who now swam buoyantly and easily, the tide having turned.

"There! Is that better?"

"My girl! . . . Mine!" he muttered. "No, don't loose it again . . . *ever!*"

He crushed her closer, shutting out for that moment of ecstasy all thought of the impending wrench—of the falling-in, the blare of the band, the crowded platform, the laughing, boyish faces clustered at every carriage-window, the warm hand-grips of strangers, the gaiety above the pang, the shouted good-byes—"good luck to our Tommies!"—the cheers that rang to the echoing glass roof as the troop-train steamed out of the station, taking the men to their battles abroad, leaving the women to theirs, at home. . . . For that moment in the gloom of the Park below the searchlights that swept the guarded skies, an English soldier held his love as though he would not let her go.

"But that's not all?" he demanded hoarsely. "*Nell!*"

She answered to that call as though she had always known his lover's-name for her. As if the flood carried her, she set back her golden head. She shut

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

her eyes ; yielding, yielding and presently returning kisses that left her his—for ever.

" And now," muttered her lover almost on her lips, " now you can say—— "

" Oh, Ted," protested Rosamond Fayre, all trembling and alight, " do I have to—oh, after all this—to *say* anything ? "

" Only what you wrote," he insisted, " on the side of that letter. I think I'd like to have it from your own mouth, thanks—— "

And he had that too ; whispered and warm, this time, and real.

" My darling ! "

POSTSCRIPT

WISH AND FULFILMENT

"**W**HY, you jumped at me, you know you did," Captain Urquhart summed up a teasing discussion with his young wife.

They were sitting at lazy ease in two deck-chairs set right up in the bows of his steam yacht as she sped along under tropic, star-strewn skies and over tropic seas, at night.

They were on their second honeymoon now (the first having lasted two days only), and the silhouette of the couple showed black as ivory against the restless silver of the water.

"Naturally, I jumped at you," took up Mrs. Ted Urquhart's pretty mocking voice. "There was I, a penniless pauper of a secretary-girl, and out of work at that, remember! Suddenly confronted with the chance of being released for life from the fear of penury and the need to work—besides the chance of starring it as a hero's wife. Of course she snapped at it! And now you throw it in her face——"

"Ah! Shamefully ill-used, isn't she?" the young husband responded with an easy laugh.

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

"Always getting ragged about something now, if it's only about the phosphorescence looking so wonderful, like summer-lightning on the waves——"

They laughed together as together they watched that iridescent toss to either hand through which their boat was cutting her way.

For that which had been on the evening of their first meeting just a flicker of light on the French waves, was steeping this velvet night in a steady wash of flame.

"I said then that this was how you ought to see it, Nell," muttered Ted Urquhart softly. "Remember?"

And, since she would not answer, he leant suddenly forward and caught hold of her by a fold of the wrap that she wore over her dainty frock.

"Don't you hear that I'm speaking to you? The first time I set eyes on you, my lady, I gave you a good shaking," he told her, "I'm going to shake you again now, I think."

She submitted with the little laugh that was sometimes, when her husband held her, not very far from a sob.

For it was his left arm that he used.

His right arm hung in a sling, like the arm of that eighteen-year-old officer-boy whom she had seen in Piccadilly. *But with a difference.* That other promising young officer might return to the front after his wound was healed; but for Captain Urquhart there could be no return to Active Service,

WISH AND FULFILMENT

to the fight for England, Home and Beauty—
against Germany, " Civilization and Culture."

His wounds had been two ; a bullet in the leg
accounted for one. But though it had restored him
to her, his wife could not allow herself to think of
the other. It had been dealt him even as he had
lain helpless on the field ; and it had rendered useless
the tendons of his right wrist. . . .

Such had been, for Ted Urquhart, the Fortune
of War.

It was the Fortune of Love that he might draw
his young wife to him at last, and might hide his
bronzed face again in the warm white velvet of
her throat.

The ribbon that she sometimes wore, with the
old paste ornament, was reposing at that moment
in her husband's jacket-pocket. And now he put
another circlet of kisses about her neck ; added a
clasp, a pendant.

" No, but Ted !—Listen, I wanted to ask you
something about that first evening—— "

" M'm ? "

" You know that new moon wish—— "

" Oh, I believe there is some old superstition of
that sort," commented Captain Urquhart with
mock dignity. " Is there not ? "

" Yes, but did you ? " she insisted. " I noticed
you—— "

" Sweet of you," he acknowledged. " I thought

THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMOND FAYRE

you never would 'notice' me, Nell. That was my trouble, just then."

"Nonsense. You were quite conceited enough to see that I liked you from the very beginning—I don't mean 'see,' I mean 'imagine'," Mrs. Urquhart corrected herself hastily. "Well, I noticed that you put your hand up to the safety-pin at your collar when you were speaking about the new moon. . . . Do tell me," she broke off into a coaxing whisper as she nestled her head down again. "Were you touching gold for a wish?"

"As a matter of fact, I was," admitted the young man. "I was wishing that I might have gold to touch. And I've got it," concluded Ted Urquhart happily, with his lips on Rosamond's hair.

THE END

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